Narratives of Selfhood: A Study of the Arabic Biographical Novel, 1967- 2010

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Abstract

Scholarship on the Arabic novel often approaches it in light of questions of national consciousness, identity formation and contact with the West. This study relates the traditional fictional narrative of individual self-development found in biographical subgenres of the novel such as the Bildungsroman, autobiographical and confessional novels with these scholarly enterprises. It explores how biographical forms, as found in the post-1967 Arabic novel, have reflected an individualistic worldview that began as a reaction to certain collectivist ideas inherited from a previous generations of writers and intellectuals. The individualism of biographical forms is shown to be a reaction to the literary conventions associated with the themes of national identity and the Western encounter.

The *New Sensibility* movement that evolved during the period that the study covers is analysed in relation to various Arabic texts from eight countries. Theories of intertextuality provide the interpretive tools to discuss the links between those novels and the changes in genres over time. Gérard Genette's concept of hypertextuality is one of such tools used to analyse the relationship between the contemporary texts and their predecessors, and Bakhtin's ideas on utterances and speech genres allow me to interpret the implied writers' views on the values associated with the literary convention in which they are participating. I use three prototypical narratives to summarise the elements of the established literary conventions and the presuppositions of the writers and readers.

The study focuses on two recurrent themes in the contemporary biographical novel; political activism and immigration. It shows how these two topics were developed literary codes that contemporary writers gave new significations. In prototypical narratives, they were literary vehicles for imagining a unified community, and in the late twentieth century they transformed into narratives of self-discovery and individualistic emphasis on uniqueness and agency. By focusing on certain attributes of the biographical form, such as the spontaneous desire of the individual and the persistent motif of the double, I show how this

particular subgenre of the novel was used to disturb the collectivist ideologies and stable speech genres that had become prevalent by the latter half of the twentieth century.

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A Note on Translation and Transliteration

The following table outlines the transliterations used in this thesis.

ء	ʿ
ب	b
ت	t
ث	th
ج	j
ح	ḥ
خ	kh
د	d
ذ	dh
ر	r
ز	z
س	s
ش	sh
ص	ṣ
ض	ḍ
ط	t
ع	c
غ	gh
ق	q
ك	k
ل	l
م	m
ن	n
ه	h
و	w
ي	y
Short vowels	a, i, u
Long vowels	ā, ī, ū

In cases where an Arab author’s work is originally published in English, the spelling of the name chosen for the translation remains. On other occasions, names that are widely known (such as Mahfouz) remain untransliterated.

All the translations in this thesis are my own, unless stated otherwise.

Declaration

This is to attest that no material from this thesis has been included in any work submitted for this or any other university.

Statement of Copyright

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This thesis was written during a tumultuous time in the Middle East, and being away from home was a source of anxiety. I am indebted to a very large community of Egyptian expatriate researchers and professionals that provided me with a forum to express my uncensored ideas and critiques at a time when there was room for nothing but intolerance. Their debates enabled me to fine tune my perspective on current and historical events. Without them, this thesis would not have been the same.

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Chapter One: Overview

I. Introduction

The immense ambitions of pan-Arabism and its associated pseudo-ideologies of Nasserism and Baathism have been dealt blow after blow since the Six-Day War defeat of 1967. There have been a number of studies on the effects of this on intellectual life in Arab countries.[1] Although the established textbooks on modern Arabic literature are careful to describe the effect of these ideologies in their heyday on literary trends, there is a clear gap in the scholarship in the trajectory of the Arabic novel in their aftermath.[2] This dissertation is an effort to fill part of the gap by describing how the subsequent ideological shifts manifested in the evolution of the biographical novel. Specifically, I will show how narratives of selfhood have developed in the contemporary Arabic novel to emphasise human agency, and reassert the value of the individual by launching a critique of the collectivism embedded in the literary conventions of the previous generation of novelists.

I have chosen this genre because the post-1967 intellectual trends presented new discourse about the individual self; specifically, its relationship with society and the nation, the extent of its agency and its subsequent responsibilities. As Roger Allen (2001) notes, the Zeitgeist of the post-1967 era was that of "self-reflection" (3). In this study, I contend that the Arabic biographical novel in the late twentieth century became one of the sites in which debates about subjectivity that had been central to the rise of the Western novel regained their vigour. Reading the Arabic novel as a forum in which individual characters exercise choice and free will is not common in scholarship, and there are many reasons for this. Roger Allen (2001) pointed out that Western academia has focused on the pre-1967 period and ignored later works, even in the awarding of the 1988 Nobel Prize to Mahfouz. Stephen Meyer (2001) noticed that postcolonial critics in Western institutions were likely to privilege the pre-1967 period, which influenced not only the choice of text but

[1] See Laroui (1974) Ajami (1981) and Abu Rabi (2004).
2 See, for example, Allen (1995) Badawī (1993), Hafez (1993) and Abu-Deeb (2000).

also the approach to it; consequently skewing the conclusions on the Arabic novel in favour of the nationalistic, *Iltizām* (commitment) and largely Marxist ideological trends prevalent at the time. This is evident even in recent theoretical readings of the Arabic novel, published in the Noughties and drawing conclusions on contemporary literature, but heavily dependent on realist fiction that was influenced by the legacy of an earlier generation of established writers.[3] Waïl S.Hassan (2002) and Abu Rabi (2004) agree that although Arabic literature originated inquiry that later developed into the field of postcolonial studies and contemporary intellectual thought, the Arabic literary and intellectual output of the 1980s and 1990s has not been taken into account in more recent developments of the "sophisticated apparatus" of postcolonial theory (Hassan, 45).[4] This has resulted in a gap in both postcolonial theory and the knowledge of Arabic literary trends in the late twentieth century and the Noughties, which is the historical period covered by this study.

A major contribution of this study to the field of Arabic literary history will be in its presentation of some of the post-1967 works, both widely read and lesser known, within a larger intertextual space. It attempts to describe a process by which these various texts participate in the biographical genre. So while a few of the novels presented here have been analysed and critiqued in several other studies, as I will elaborate below, this one will focus on how they function within an intertextual web of literary connections, and how they relate to the works of other writers that preceed and follow them. In doing so, it brings together many of the observations on the contemporary Arabic novel made by others regarding specific authors or national literatures in order to describe a general individualistic trend in the writing of Arabic fiction. It explores how many of the major themes in the Arabic novel of the previous period, such as the contact with the West and the conflict between radical artists and activists and the state, were renogatiated and resignified in the post-1967 period. I attempt to both extrapolate the existing narrative of the rise of the modern Arabic novel to

[3] A good example is Musawi's (2009) reading of "mass culture narratives" in post-1967 Arabic fiction.

[4] Many thanks to Dr Christina Phillips for noting the many exceptions to this in the presentations and debates in conferences and workshops on Modern Arabic Literature, in contrast to the widely read textbooks about it.

bring it more toward the twenty first century and also to unveil some of the limitations of continuing to read novels using the givens of that history of the novel that belong to a different period.

Furthermore, the assumption in this thesis is that although studies of novels specific to Arab nations and communities within them yields great insights, there are general intellectual and literary trends that move across the state borders of this region. This is not only because of a common language and the related cultural heritage of Arab nations, but also because texts evolve in response to intertextual relations and genre requirements. Literary texts are not merely written in reaction to national historical events, but emerge out of relations with other artistic products that transcend geographical borders. The recent events of the so-called Arab Spring only go to show how differing political climates translate into similar primary and secondary speech genres (see next Chapter).

In his thesis on a*l-Ḥasāsiya al-Jadīda* (*New Sensibility*), which is a work that will be important to this study, al-Kharrāṭ (1993) shows that there was a re-emergence in the post-1967 era of an introspective approach in the Arabic novel that emphasised the individual's choices in the world. He suggests that in the Fifties this was subdued due to the prevalence of social realism and its associations with the ideologies mentioned. Al- Kharrāṭ puts this *New Sensibility* in an historical framework. The Arab nations experienced a period of optimism in the Forties and Fifties brought about by independence and socialist/nationalist rhetoric. Conversely, the post-1967 era was one "where the collective self was torn apart. The word 'socialism' faded into ill-repute" (128). Wen-chin Ouyang (2001) agrees with al-Kharrāṭ that, after 1967, there was a "shift from nationalist representations of reality" and the novel became self-absorbed in its formalistic preoccupations; a fact that she interprets as a "statement on the disintegration of the nation-state" (62). On this point, there might be some disagreement with Abi Samra (2001), Ramadan (2012) and al-Ajami (1981) who insist that these movements and writers still dominated the intellectual scene well into the Seventies when writing became their only "weapon" against the censorship and imprisonment imposed by totalitarian Arab governments (Abi Samra, 2001: 161).

According to some critics, politics has played a central role in the Arabic novel; the content may be overtly political or readers have approached the novel with the expectation that it is politically relevant.[5] This has resulted in varied responses; from the celebratory studies of those who believe in the novel's power as socio-political critique, to accusations that many Arabic novels are polemics in disguise.[6] I hope in this genre study to maintain a focus on the generic qualities of novels as manifested in their ever-changing structures and themes after laying out in this introductory chapter the social and historical significance of these aesthetic developments.

Theorists of the novel have struggled to reach a consensus on the definition of the genre.[7] In as much as that task has been attempted, there is a tendency to see that the genre evolved as a product of individualist ideology in the West, with eighteenth-century narratives such as *Robinson Crusoe* providing the earliest recognisable form of the novel. Seventeenth century works such as *Don Quixote* are also recognised as early prototypes of the modern novel, while Watt (1957, 1997) historicises the idea of the unique individual in Western literature reflected in these early works. According to Watt's account, the novel is a literary form that valorises the individual by allowing the reader inside a character's private life and thoughts, and by constructing events as reflections of individual choices. In this chapter, I will focus on how the characteristics of individualism are particularly prominent in the biographical sub-genres of the novel: the Bildungsroman, confessional and autobiographical novels.

Any discussion of the ideological framework of the entire genre of the novel without a more specific historical period or geographical region is bound to be reductionist. The novel as a genre has a long history and is "a planetary form."[8] This study presents debates about the novel as an individualistic genre, which are often repeated by scholars in order to highlight those characteristics by which the genre is judged to be ideological. This will assist me in my thesis as I explore how the biographical sub-genres of the novel manifest as an individualistic trend in the contemporary Arabic literature. I am well aware that

[5] Ibid.
[6] Examples are numerous, but see Hafez (2000, 118, 120) and Meyer (2001, 4, 46), respectively.
[7] Hale (2006).
[8] See Moretti (2011).

each of these scholars had in mind specific national literatures (for Watt, 1957, and Armstrong, 2005 and 2006, it is Britain) or even specific writers (for Bakhtin, 1973 and 1986, it is Stendhal, Balzac, Dostoevsky) when they presented their descriptions and critiques of the genre. Still, their ideas have become integral to any discussion about the novel as an individualistic literary form.

The origins of the Arabic novel specifically, however, have been studied by scholars in a very different context. Originating in Egypt and Lebanon in the early twentieth century, the Arabic novel is interwoven within a history of nation-building, national identity formation and the struggle with Western imperialism. This early context has formed a matrix within which the Arabic novel is often studied.[9] Haykal's *Zaynab*, first published in 1914, is considered one of the first instances of the Arabic novel. Although it is a novel of development of the protagonist, this aspect of its structure is often neglected for a focus on its presentation of anxiety over modernisation.[10]

The study of individualism in the contemporary novel must be preceded logically by a working definition of individualism; the work of Louis Dumont (1986) and Steven Lukes (1973) will be relevant for this purpose. I will refer to the individualistic worldview's relationship with the ideological shifts represented by the novels of this study. This will summarise the intellectual trend in which the novelists of this study participated, as well as constitute a step towards understanding the economic and political realities that were written into the contemporary novel. I will introduce in this chapter the effect of the economic liberalisation policies perceived to have been adopted by Arab states during the period of study in order to clarify, in the next chapters, how they reformulated structures and themes within biographical genres.

Evidently, my approach extends beyond the study of an individual work or author, as a study of genres must, and attempts to, reveal a literary system interwoven within a larger cultural and political history. In the next chapter, I will clarify my methods by outlining the relevant critical tools suggested by Jonathan Culler (1976), Gérard Genette (1992, 1997) and Roland Barthes (2002), among others. I will outline the benefits and challenges of an

[9] See Roger Allen (2007).
[10] See Kilpatrick (1974).

intertextual and genre study, after which I will present the limitations of my own owing to decisions I made for interpretive convenience.

One of the contributions of this study to the field of literary theory will be in its application of intertextuality: it approaches a number of novels to identify how they gauge the changes to the cultural text over a historical period. As I will elaborate in the coming chapter, intertextual theory has been known to present numerous obstacles when applied, in practice, to the reading of texts. How can one read texts in relation to each other and explore an intertextual space without focusing exclusively on influence or imitation? Here, I scrutinize the presuppositions of each literary text and the process with which it engages with an evolving genre of biographical fiction. Influence is irrelevant, but the way the generic constituents seep into texts that display differing degrees of authorial consciousness is important. I apply many of tools of intertextual and genre theory that are known to present challenges to literary reading .

One of these challenges is that an intertextual study should present social and political facts as inseparable threads of the fabric of the literary texts, and not merely as a setting onto which literature is written. Theoretically, this is an important feature of an intertextual approach, especially if it claims to unveil larger ideological concerns through its analysis of literary conventions. Unfortunately, this ideal type of study would afford cultural changes, artistic output and reception, state policies, etc., the same emphasis as the many literary texts it includes, and would stretch this dissertation far too thin. Therefore, I must “set” some of the politico-economic realities and intellectual debates of the period, in summary, at the beginning and proceed using Michael Riffaterre’s (1994) notion of the limited intertextuality of literary writing, which I will explain below.

II. Economic liberalisation in the post-1967 era and associated changes in intellectual climate

The June 1967 war is perceived as the historical event that precipitated shocking changes in the intellectual climate in the region. A more nuanced study of contemporary history, such as that written by Ajami (1981), shows how pan-Arabism met another challenge during the collapse of Lebanon over 15 years of civil strife.[11] The Nineties added insult to injury for pan-Arabism's adherents: Algeria's bloody civil war and Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait made it unavoidable for Arab intellectuals to see that Arabs not only disagreed within themselves, but also were willing to kill each other. Needless to say, Egypt, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria and UAE's inclusion in the Gulf War coalition cemented this picture. Abu Rabi (2004) stresses the impact of Arab states' role in the coalition and claims it is one of the most important events in the contemporary intellectual scene, even more important than 1967. The successive conflicts from 1967 to the present day meant that the "totalising discourse" of the previous generation of intellectuals was withering away gradually.[12]

As in any historical study, taking the date of a major political event as a starting point presents problems. The 1967 defeat is only significant when analysed within the discourse that saw it as the ultimate affliction; the "setback" (*naksa*). Abu Rabi claims it is equally valid to take 1798 (French invasion of Egypt) or 1948 (creation of Israel) as dates relevant to this discourse. The Six-Day War as an historical event and an analytical starting point simplifies a tumultuous past. It epitomises both the failure of nationalistic post-independence regimes to deliver on their many promises and the antagonistic relationship between the Middle East and the West. This is by no means the only way to view events in the Arab world. For example, non-Western nations are equally likely to meddle in the affairs of Arab countries. In the post-1967 era, Iran is a significant player in the affairs of Arab countries; however, the relationship with the West as a culture and as political entity has mostly occupied Arab creative writers, even those from countries that are playing an

[11] Ajami (1978) made his views on the end of the idea of pan-Arabism earlier in his important article in *Foreign Affairs*.
[12] Abu-Deeb (2000)

increasingly influential roles in politics.[13] In my study, I prefer to move forward from that date rather than backward if only for the reason mentioned above; it is the post-1967 period that is relatively unexplored as literary history.

Numerous events after 1967 disturbed pan-Arabism in its emphasis on the solidarity of Arabs as a unit and its intense anti-Western and anti-Israeli rhetoric.[14] Kamal Abu Deeb (2000) summarises other major sociopolitical events that affected the intellectual and literary climate by the end of the century; besides the changes in attitudes towards Israel and the Palestinian question, there were changing classes arising from greater income inequality, rivalry between what he calls the "centres" of the Arab world and its peripheries, conflicts between competing nationalisms and the emergence of minority consciousness. Abu-Deeb (2000) believes the seeds of change began in the Seventies, which was a decade when "doubt, anxiety and bewilderment began to replace the tone of utter certainty and faith" (348).

This decade of self-doubt and criticism saw intellectuals revisiting the frustrating questions of what went wrong, and why their nations were not progressing compared with the West or even other developing nations.[15] Muhsin Jassim Ali (1983) studies numerous novels from across the region to show that the Seventies witnessed transitions in the literary scene; where individualism, psychological depth and uniqueness of character were increasingly visible in the novel but where it was still dominated by the urge to be a literary work "with a purpose" (XIV). The Socialist rhetoric that pronounced itself in the partisan politics of both Baathism and Nasserism was also retreating, which had a profound effect on the novel. I would like to elaborate on the political economy of the following period by referring to Harik and Sullivan (1992), and Richards and Waterbury (1996).

The late Seventies witnessed the launching of *Infitāḥ* (openness, mainly in reference to economic liberalisation) in Egypt, followed later by similar policies in other countries in the region. Liberalisation was propelled by the oil revolution that left migrant workers with extra capital, encouraged Arab tourism and

[13] See Lewis (2009)
[14] See Hourani (1983) "Arab nationalism" for a discussion of the relationship between the origins of the concept of an Arab world and the Palestinian question.
[15] For a discussion of these perceptions regarding the comparative progress of Arab countries vis-**à**-vis other developed and developing nations, see Lewis (2001).

increased foreign investment. The complicated privatisation and liberalisation policies were a feature in many Arab countries, whereby states sold off businesses but continued to be “controller, gatekeeper, protector, regulator and fiscal decision maker” and hand-picked its business partners (Harik and Sullivan, 1992: 8-9). In Iraq, for example, multinational companies bribed key government officials and contractors were largely comprised of a limited number of families. In other words, Arab states pursued liberalisation policies in ebb and flow patterns (think removal of subsidies in Egypt, which incited bread riots in 1977 and has been on the agenda since then). But, importantly, from an Arab (radical) intellectual viewpoint, at the time it was irrelevant how many of these liberalisation policies were actually underway or effective, only that their threat was ever-present. Keeping in mind the ideas of a generation of intellectuals who supported nationalisation initiatives, it becomes evident why the threat of economic liberalisation was associated with a period of disillusionment among Arab intellectuals.

One related cultural effect of these topsy-turvy state actions was that local communities based on mosques and churches began providing public services to diminish the need to rely on failing governments; a phenomenon that accelerated the rise of the Islamism and sectarianism that was underway in the region at large. Sullivan (1992) explores how Islamist organisations provided “free” economic services in exchange for visible signs of religiosity (wearing the veil) in universities. Migrant workers and investors in Islamic Investment Companies “carried many of the signs of the Islamic revival in Egypt” (Harik and Sullivan, 53). Sadat attempted to consolidate his policy of *Infitāḥ* by clamping down on socialists and temporarily allying with Islamists. This increased visibility of religion in local communities is an important feature of the novels in this study. One senses the alarm that the authors, all belonging to a class of intellectuals influenced by secularist nationalism, feel in response to this cultural change. It is unsurprising that some of these secularist intellectuals felt the need for ideas that protected the rights of individuals and small non-Muslim communities in an era where Islamism swept over countries at an alarming speed and socialism/nationalism as a valid alternative ideology was defeated after a failing track record. It is true that while economic liberalisation created classes that threatened the status quo in some countries, in others it

did not have the same effect (comparing Egypt and Iraq, for example). Yet the spirit of pan-Arabism and the ideological legacy of the struggle for independence in the Middle East can be said to have been shared among many of the intellectuals of the region, even where the economic policies of individual nations yielded very different results in practice.[16]

While the visible signs of religiosity that began to be more widespread in the aftermath of the oil revolution resulted in anxiety for the secularist circles of intellectuals and writers, the more insightful critics and historians could trace the similarities between Islamic and secularist nationalist intellectual movements to the earlier decades of the twentieth century. Laroui (1974) noticed that contemporary Islamic ideology was linked to nationalism and that it shared with it an "anticapitalism that is conceived chiefly as a token of separation from the West, an egalitarian statism that consolidates communal unity…intrinsic and irreducible utopianism" (90). Islamism flourished by adopting the socialist and equalitarian language of Arab nationalism and fed on its presentation of the West as an evil synonymous with capitalism. It was not difficult to make a case before the populations of Arab countries that the idea of an Islamic community *(Ummah*) was not a huge doctrinal leap from pan-Arabism. The anti-imperialist rhetoric of independence movements, represented by the novel *al-Bāb al-Maftūḥ* (al-Zayyāt, 1960, The Open Door) in this study, harkened back to the supremacist cultural codes embedded in the language of Islamism of the type found in *Mawsim al-Ḥijra ilā 'l-Shamāl* (Ṣaliḥ, 1966, Season of Migration to the North)[17]. Ajami (1981) explains that radical intellectuals never sold secularist nationalism successfully to the masses and "the presumed incompatibility between nationalism and Islam [did not] hold for the Arab world. The more popular nationalism became, the more it identified with Islam" (51).[18]

Harik and Sullivan (1992) explain that the *patron state* phenomenon associated with post-independence movements contributed to the entrenchment of authoritarianism and bureaucracy and was maintained both by

[16] For the origins and early history of Pan-Arabism and its relationship with other nationalisms, see Hourani (1983) "Arab nationalism", 260-323.
[17] In the text of this dissertation, I refer to each novel's date of first publication for clarity. Any page citations refer to the editions cited in bibliography.
[18] See Hourani (1983) for more on the relationship between Islam and Arab nationalism in the modern Arab world.

"acts of compulsion…[and] mass mobilization" (2). Post-independence Arab states sponsored artists, intellectuals and journalists to spur on these mass mobilisations to meet ideological commitments that could not be maintained financially.[19] Musawi (2009) likewise observes that ideas regarding nationalism were disseminated across the entire region through a "legacy of acculturation and intertextuality" and lays specific emphasis on the influence of popular culture (cinema, music, etc) and state education in this process. The political motivation of state intervention manifested in the existence of a state-owned and controlled press in Algeria, Egypt, Tunisia, Libya, Syria and Iraq.

The complex dynamic produced by the desire to liberalise *and* control the economy was a common factor between the two divergent ideological types of Arab regimes, which Richards and Waterbury (1996) classify as "socialist republics" and "liberal monarchies" (297). Ajami (1981) prefers to classify them as radical or revolutionary (states based on pro-independence revolutionary parties and military regimes) and conservative or reactionary states (the monarchies). Studies of the period reveal a striking similarity between the economic policies of most Arab states. Despite the apparent differences between Saudi Arabia, Iraq and Jordan, these countries undertook comparable privatisation and liberalisation policies in the 1980s. By 1989, the word "socialism" had been removed entirely from the Algerian constitution, but Algerians were very suspicious of private entrepreneurs and there were many bureaucratic hurdles to foreign direct investment.[20] Similar sentiments were shared by other Arab countries, such as Egypt and even by Saudi business interests who lobbied to increase barriers to trade. Richards and Waterbury discuss how "monarchs…have also espoused the cause of economic development and have marshalled state resources and large technocracies to pursue them" (297).[21] Notwithstanding different state policies of economic liberalisation, the general public, the intellectual and business elites mostly did not endorse the idea.

In the absence of lasting military occupations by Western countries in the region during the Eighties, it was difficult to maintain the myth of the unity of the

[19] Kendall (2006) and Jacquemond's (2008) studies of the relationship between writers and the state summarise the effects of this phenomenon.
[20] See Vanderwalle (1992).
[21] See also Harik and Sullivan (1992), 203.

community of Arabs that had been imagined originally as a form of resistance to Western occupation.[22] The Middle East's diversity surfaced clearly: "the Arabs who had once seemed whole – both to themselves and others – suddenly looked as diverse as they had been all along" (Ajami, 1974: 365). Besides the obvious sectarian strife in Lebanon, there were tensions among other communities such as the Kurds and Shiites in Iraq, Copts in Egypt and Berbers in North Africa, not to mention migrant workers associated with the oil revolution who suffered marginalisation issues as well. In Shamᶜūn's *ᶜIraqī fī Parīs* (2005) and Kachachī's (2008) *al-Ḥafīda al-ʻAmrīkiyya*, where narratives of Iraqi Christians in exile are presented with all the dilemmas of being a minority member both at home and abroad, the simple dichotomy of the West vs. the united Arab nation, through which Arab nationalism viewed the world becomes undone. By the Eighties, it became obvious that "literary texts that in the previous decades had been shaped by a conscious desire to achieve…unity, began to show signs of discarding the notion of unity altogether" (Abu-Deeb, 2000: 339).

Although I will not be studying any instances of Islamist literature in this thesis, I will demonstrate how the mainstreaming of Islamist thought from the Seventies to the present is reflected in the reaction by the secular writers of biographical novels. I will argue that, in many cases, it is precisely this cultural change that triggered the apparent feelings of failure and renunciation of previous beliefs that these novels often implied. Musawi (2009) discusses how certain secularist writers, such as Ghitanī and Mahfouz, integrated Islamist trends into their narratives. Musawi's overall contention, one that is supported by the novels in this study, is that Arab novelists largely belonged to an educated, elitist class that was removed from, and even hostile, to the Islamist cultural practices seemingly embraced by the masses.

Despite the negative reactions to both Islamisation and economic liberalisation within secular Nationalist/Socialist circles, there were seldom detailed discussions of viable alternatives or proposals for a resolution to the post-1967 Arab state of affairs. Richards and Waterbury (1996) reveal the poverty of that ideology

[22] Hourani (1983)

> Socialism in the Middle East has not been inspired by doctrinaire Marxism or sustained by coherent socialist political parties. Rather, the appending of the term 'socialism' to various loosely structured political fronts has symbolized commitment to equity and distributive policies, public ownership as a means of production…the drive for development…what has made some more radical than others has generally been their conduct of foreign policy rather than their domestic politics (285).

They elaborate their thesis on the failure of ideology in the Middle East. They claim the general intellectual trends of the region had several common themes, namely:

> National strength, meaning freedom from imperial control…building a new citizen and a new sense of citizenship…something that would be achieved once foreign control had been ended and domestic oppressor classes such as large landowners and compradors eliminated. Mass literacy, public health, and a booming planned economy…[a] mass party, which would educate new generations in nationalist and civic duties. Every regime espoused the equitable distribution of the benefits of economic growth. Some called this 'socialism' and some did not…Had the planned, state-dominated economies worked up to expectations, had the expansion and increasing quality of education and social services kept pace with unchecked population growth….then perhaps the accompanying ideologies may have had some impact upon the broad strata of Middle Eastern society. But the many performance failures…rendered the rhetoric hollow and ultimately a target for derision and anger (321-2).

Consequently, the systematic endorsement of official nationalism by Arab states, in the form of funding and controlling journalists, writers, musicians, the film industry, education and other cultural institutions and productions, did not conceal its bankruptcy as an idea or the state's inefficient management from the public eye.[23] It may be said that these disappointments resulted in three patterns of reactions, all of which are registered in the novels of this study. The first two are documented in the scholarship about the period: a turn to Islamism as another viable populist ideology or, alternatively, an insistence on the Socialist/secularist doctrine while maintaining its failures were those of implementation rather than concept.[24] One further trend I emphasise is that of withdrawal from politics accompanied by an adoption of an individualist political stance.

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[23] Jacquemond (2008) and Kendall (2006) explore the ramifications of the relationship of the cultural industry with secular state propaganda.

[24] Ajami (1981), Harik and Sullivan (1992), Richards and Waterbury (1996) and many others discuss these two diverging intellectual reactions. Hourani (1983) discusses the withdrawal of those he considers liberal thinkers from the public sphere.

Early studies of intellectual trends of the period, such as Laroui's (1974), often gloss over this third trend. The reason may lie in Laroui's description of career paths of those that belong to it: "some liberals, in despair, returned to tradition…those who maintained their liberal convictions adopt an individualistic scale of values…their attitude was actually one of indifference" (119). While his accurate description may render the contribution of these individualists to the political sphere minimal, I contend that they have a visible presence in the Arabic novel. Kamal-Abu Deeb (2000) describes their involvement in a new aesthetic in which "we are no longer all Semites, Arabs or Muslim; we are now ourselves; each to his own identity, each a unit of being, discourse and quest" (364).

III. *Iltizām* and the legacy of social realism

As mentioned above, the Arabic novel has been studied in relation to these pan-Arab Nationalist, Secularist/Socialist and anti-imperial intellectual trends of the independence era. Badawī (1993) writes an overview of how the nationalist movements in the early twentieth century gave birth to two ideologies: Islamism and a mixture of socialism and nationalism. He shows how the conflicting ideologies polarised intellectuals and explains how the process of independence after WWII was directed against both the perceived enemy within and without; richer privileged communities of Arab nations as well as the West. His sweep of the ideology of fiction writers of the time shows that they had in common an antagonism toward the West and a desire for cultural autonomy. He mentions *Iltizām* as the relevant literary trend of the mid-twentieth century. Like Nasserism and Baathism, *Iltizām's* "meaning was diffuse, to be sure: sometimes it meant the adoption of a Marxist stand, at other times an existentialist position, but at all times it denoted at least a certain measure of nationalism, Arab or otherwise" (16). The movement was one of "Socialist realism", in which the commitment of the writers was reflected in the themes of "social injustice and class struggle" (54). He highlights how critiques of the West and its culture came as a part of modernity and part of the very constitution of the genre of the Arabic novel.

Isstaif (2000) explores the concepts of the Marxist-inspired literary trend that had matured and gained widespread following in the Sixties. The idea of connecting socialism to the functions of art by insisting on art's social impact can be found in the Thirties in the works of al-ᶜAqqād and Salāma Mūsa. Works on Marxist interpretations of literature in Arabic were available in the Forties and Fifties, as Isstaif elaborates. This began as calls to use colloquial Arabic that was more representative of the language of the people, to dogmatic calls that literature must strive to have a purpose, which was the principle of *al-'Adab al-Multazim* (commitment literature). This period saw a divide between two camps: those that espoused Marxist and socialist ideas and strived to formulate theories of literature that could reflect them; and another camp that Isstaif and others labelled "liberals", which was associated increasingly with the old guard. The latter was led by Ṭaha Ḥusayn and was wary of prescriptive demands on literature that envisioned it should reflect and participate in the creation of "a

society of a homogenous and levelled culture", as Luwīs ᶜAwaḍ did (cited in Isstaif, 2000).

The politico-economic changes mentioned above and their ramifications on society and the region's perception of itself necessitated a change of outlook for Arab intellectuals, a group with whom most novelists in the region have historically identified. It was high time in the post-1967 era (and slightly before that for the more insightful among novelists) for *Iltizām* as a prescriptive measure for writing fiction to be revisited. Yasmine Ramadan (2012) demonstrates how in the aftermath of the crushing defeat in the Six-Day War, a group of emerging writers (known as the Sixties' generation or the *New Sensibility* movement) began challenging the dominant literary trends of their predecessors and asserting themselves as a different generation. She describes the writings of the new generation similarly to al-Kharrāṭ (1993): a rejection of social realism, an inclination to more subjective writing, stream of consciousness, fractured narratives, mythology and magic realism…etc. Ramadan mentions one the new writers' Western influences as Saul Bellow, a novelist known for his mastery of the confessional genre, which confirms my argument on the development of the biographical genre post-1967.[25]

Although the *New Sensibility* originated in the late Sixties, its characteristics as a movement did not emerge fully until the Eighties. Edwar al-Kharrāṭ clearly regards 1967 as the turning point that began the new movement; however, nearly all the novels and short stories he offers as examples of it were written in the Eighties. Sabry Hafez (1976) identified, early on, the failure of the movement to take-off smoothly from the beginning. His main argument, endorsed by Ramadan, is that many younger authors of the Sixties had not yet acquired the skill to convey fully their message in new styles of writing. The more established writers may have produced better works, but were still influenced by the literary styles and themes of the previous era. The characters of their novels were still overwhelmed by fear and defeat, and their inner world was portrayed constantly in novels as a function of outside events (a trait associated with social realism). Many writers remained focused on writing as a tool to fight for equality on the international as well as local stage and remained

[25] See Axthelm (1967)

focused on the Israeli-Palestinian problem. The authors created characters that, according to Hafez (1976), had an incomplete personality, either intentionally as a sociopolitical critique or unintentionally because of the author's inexperience.

Furthermore, Verenna Klemm (2000) demonstrates clearly that although the Seventies marked a clear departure from the committed, nationalistic and anti-colonialist writing of the previous decade, *Iltizām* was transformed gradually into self-criticism where the nation criticises its own state, its dictators and corrupt justice system.[26] Ḥamdī Sakkūt (2000) notes that those named the generation of the Sixties might have "produced some fine novels in that decade, [but] the majority wrote their most striking works in the Seventies, Eighties and even into the Nineties" (13). One of the goals of this study is to trace how these gradual transformations were manifested in the biographical genre between 1967 and 2010.

The fact that al-Kharrāṭ published his thesis on the Sixties' generation in 1993 is evidence that many of its characteristics were not immediately visible to its members. Al-Kharrāṭ's description of what the generation stood for (for example, they were less concerned with art as a vehicle for social change) often conflicted with how the writers would have described themselves.[27] He focused on launching a diatribe on dogmatic social critique in novels and on political motivation that exceeds the basic ambition of art: raising awareness. For him, writing is an intimate, solitary and creative experience. He offers the most passionate attack on social realism in the Arabic novel on the grounds that "it failed to unravel the depths of the self…social issues…swallowed up the concerns of the hero and characters…[in social realism] there was one monophonic sound to all voices" (al-Kharrāṭ, 1993; 27). Al-Kharrāṭ feels that emphasis on social problems drowns out the voices of the characters and, as such, destroys the "personal" in the novel. Social realism also presented the mission of art as that of reflection rather than creation: the artist should have agency in the creation of his fictional world, and the characters should have the ability to create their own destiny. He rejects determinism in a novel, whether it is on the level of the social determinants of personality, such as class, gender,

[26] For more on emerging literary movements in the Seventies see Halim (1991).
[27] See Ramadan (2012).

vocation, etc, or on the level of a fatalism that presents history as moving unstoppably down its own path, regardless of human actions. He dismisses readings of novels that impose social problems where they don't exist in the novel itself. His views on this matter are particularly clear in his (very reductionist) criticism of Mahfouz. In the subsequent chapters, I will discuss the trend of rejection of social realism using Kendall's (2006) and Jacquemond's (2008) surveys.

Al-Kharrāṭ's work can be considered a manifesto, rather than a literary history of the preceding period. His definition of the movement is too vague to provide a workable theoretical framework for his period of study. But his work presents the dynamic with which social realism, at least in its Arab form, was perceived to have overshadowed the "subjective potentiality" of individuals and provides numerous examples of new novels that succeed in bringing out the agency of their characters. An important caveat here is that these attacks on social realism by a group of writers did not signal its end as a genre. Many elements of social realism remain alive and well until today, attested to by the widespread (local and international) popularity of contemporary novels such as al-Aswany's (2006) *The Yacoubian Building*.

To claim the biographical novel flourished in the last decades of the twentieth century and the Noughties is not to say it replaced other realist genres that portrayed sociopolitical realities and spaces (cities, slums, etc). It merely grew parallel to the other genres after experiencing a period of decline in the Fifties and Sixties. To elaborate, while most of the post-1967 biographical narratives I study focus on the interiority of the characters and afford them an expanded narrative space where they often live alone in apartments or walk in cities, sit in cafes and restaurants by themselves, contemporaneous realist novels set characters in what Hafez (2001) calls "claustrophobic social spaces" (189). Hafez contends that these limited spaces in the Nineties' novel (which represents more than two decades of maturity of the writers known as the Sixties' generation) point to man's loss of control over space; whereas, I will argue below that in late biographical novels, man's sense of control over his life is increasing. While Hafez (2001) explains that the Nineties' novel set in the slums of Cairo decentred the human and was allied to postmodernist, posthumanist Western literary trends, the biographical novels presented below

seem to be working towards the goal of centering the subject and a “new Arab humanism”, as Seignuerie (2003, 2008, 2011) stresses. The ideological differences between social realism and the biographical genre are apparent in this comparison.

For the purposes of this study, I will focus on only one of the aspects of *New Sensibility*; what al-Kharrāṭ (1993) calls the “interior” trend where psychological attributes of character create the spaces and determine the events in the novel (15). This was a determining factor in the selection criteria for novels, along with having at least one novel from the Maghrib, the Mashriq, the Gulf and Egypt in each chapter to have a somewhat regionally representative study. It was also important to use novels from the Sixties and Seventies to represent how the early instances of the genre handled genre constituents to compare this with later works in Eighties, Nineties and Noughties. It was essential to include both widely disseminated works, ones that have come to exemplify the Arabic novel in a given period, as well as other less known novels to show how genre is reflected in a variety of texts. As such, the following novels came to be selected for the corpus of this thesis: Laṭīfa al-Zayyāt’s *al-Bāb al-Māftūh* (1960), Ṣaliḥ’s *Mawsim Al-Ḥijra ilā 'l-Shamāl* (1966), and Munīf’s *Sharq al-Mutawassiṭ* (1975) are used as early examples of the genre. The following decades are represented by Ḥanān al-Shaykh’s *Ḥikāyat Zahra* (1980), ᶜAlā’ al-Dīb’s *Zahr al-Laymūn* (1980), Ḥanna Mīna in *al-Rabiᶜ wa ‘l-Kharīf* (1983), Mu’nis al-Razzāz’s *‘lᶜtirāfāt Kātim Ṣawt* (1986) , Aḥlām Mostaghenami’s *Dhākirat al-Jasad* (1988), Rashīd al-Ḍaᶜīf *ᶜAzīzī al-Sayyid Kawābātā* (1995), Raḍwā ᶜĀshūr’s ‘*Aṭyāf* (1999), Batūl Khuḍayrī’s *Kam Badat al-Sama’u Qarība* (1999), Munīf’s (1999) *Qiṣat Hubb Mājūsiyya*, Khālid al-Birrī *al-Dunya ‘Ajmal Min al-Janna* (2001), Ṣamwa’īl Shamᶜūn ᶜ*Iraqī fī Parīs* (2005), Inᶜām Kachachī *al-Ḥafīda al-‘Amrīkiyya* (2008), Mīrāl al-Ṭaḥāwī *Brooklyn Heights* (2010), and al-Birrī’s (2010) *Raqṣa Sharqiyya*.

Al-Kharrāṭ’s interior trend, as this thesis will illustrate, reflects the individualist tendency in the contemporary Arabic novel. I will now proceed to explain what I mean by individualism in this study and how novels can present an individualistic worldview.

IV. Elements of individualistic discourse relevant to the study of narrative

Individualism as an ideology derives from a belief in the dignity of man, which is a moral principle that asserts that a person has value, and that society and the state are but a means toward the end of protecting and enriching that value. Lukes (1973) describes some of the basic tenets of individualism. Primarily, it emphasises the belief in autonomy or self-direction or "the notion according to which an individual's thought and action is his own and not determined by causes outside his control" (52). The novels in this study will be analysed to highlight the extent to which the narrative constructs life events as consequences of the characters' own conscious decisions. I will demonstrate how narratives that show increased self-direction become more pronounced and more self-reflexive as the decades progress. In other words, the novels in the earlier years of this study present characters that are more prone to influence by outside forces and that perform actions with little or no awareness and autonomy compared with those in the later years. In this manner, in each chapter I will show how the genre has come to present a more individualistic worldview.

Another characteristic of individualism, according to Lukes, is that it requires privacy. Society and the state need to leave Man to pursue his own goals and fulfil his destiny. Man should be able to conduct his affairs free from public interference. This can be accomplished "either by his withdrawal or by the public's forbearance" (66). Individualism also entails self-development; an individual can, through his own abilities, develop into a unique and fulfilled whole capable of achieving desired goals. Withdrawal from the public arena is a trait many critics have associated with the contemporary Arab novel, and it is one I will explore.[28] More significant is the question of whether each novel presents a path through which characters have developed into more wholesome beings. Again, the degree to which the novel explains the character's inability to do so in terms of personal responsibility, rather than external limitations, will be taken to indicate an implied individualistic value.

[28] See for example Meyer (2001), al-Kharrāṭ (1993), Kendall (2006), Ouyang (2001) and Mehrez (2002).

Related to privacy is the prominence of the conjugal family unit in an individualistic paradigm as opposed to larger extended families and communities. In his study of the rise of the novel in the West, Ian Watt (1957) describes how urbanisation and industrialisation broke up larger communities; consequently, placing significant moral value on the conjugal family. He argues that romantic love as a foundation for this conjugal family became much more momentous. The archetypal individualist hero leaves his parental home in the various traditions of the novel but there is usually a longing for the home where he establishes his own family unit, or remorse where this ideal is unrealisable. At times, the hero is deemed less sympathetic for his failure to create a family; at others, a sociopolitical critique ensues to justify this failure. In the subsequent chapters, I will use the themes of family ties and romantic love to demonstrate how the contemporary biographical novel presents a changed point of view of the individual.

Lukes (1973) identifies types of individualism, namely; abstract, political, economic, religious and ethical. He explains that with the advent of individualism, people began conceiving that the source of all knowledge is individual experience (epistemological individualism) and that "social phenomenon are to be rejected unless they are couched wholly in terms of facts about individuals" (or methodological individualism) (110). Of these, the concept of the abstract individual will be significant in almost all the novels in my study, and the remaining concepts will vary in importance in the different novels; however, each novel will stress at least one concept. The abstract individual is one with *given traits* in an environment where society and political rule are construed as artificial; he possesses "fixed and invariable human psychological features…(and) is seen merely as a bearer of these features which determine his behaviour and specify his interests, needs and rights" (Lukes, 73). Many novels in this study will emphasise these invariable psychological features by placing protagonists in different circumstances and demonstrating their inability to change. I will show how characters have spontaneous desires that are constructed as givens in the text and are reflections of individualistic biases.

Importantly, man within an individualistic paradigm is characterised by an excessive interiority. Lukes discusses how the mysticism, devoutness,

spirituality and private relationship with God in Augustine's *Confessions* are precursors for modern individualism, associating the confessional genre with the ideology. Dumont (1986) talks about religious renouncers in history; outworldly individuals that were self-sufficient and existed outside society. Reformation introduced the *worldly* outsider, as opposed to the *outworldly* one that had existed in societies before it. Ian Watt (1957) demonstrates how a novel's access to inner life and private consciousness is what gives it an edge over other literary forms. In the novel, an ordinary person's "inner life is, if we can judge, infinitely more various, more interesting and certainly more conscious of itself and its personal relationships than that of its Homeric prototype" (Watt, 207). The narrative tradition of the novel in which great emphasis is given to interiority and personal relationships presents itself in an evolved form in the works in this study: There are very few fulfiling personal relationships in these Arabic novels, but the attention to the processes of individual consciousness makes their absence even more deeply felt.

The tenets of individualism described above are acknowledged by scholars of intellectual trends to be related to the evolution of humanism and liberalism. Lukes (1973) explains how the ideas of individualism, liberalism and humanism have a "natural affinity" for each other, and that "there are connections that are more than merely historical and contingent between humanist and liberal values" (123). In the discussion of contemporary Arab intellectual trends, different scholars have used these labels interchangeably. Seigneurie (2003, 2008) talks about "humanism" in contemporary fiction and its focus on concepts, such as human dignity and basic civil rights. Ajami (1981), Laroui (1974) and Abu Rabi (2004) speak of liberals as intellectuals opposed to socialism and with a tendency to withdraw from the public sphere. I contend that just as socialism as an ideology was not subject to proper philosophical inquiry among the novelists in the region (see above), neither was liberalism nor, as Seigneurie (2003) confirms, humanism. For example, Dumont sees liberalism, socialism and nationalism as deriving from an individualist paradigm that regards citizens as equal, in contrast with the holism of traditional societies based on rigid hierarchies. Such questions are not raised by the abovementioned scholars of intellectual trends in the region, and certainly not by novelists. Besides the large two nationalist/socialist and Islamist groups of

intellectuals, there is a consensus that there is a third group, small in number and influence, of liberals (Islamists often use the word “liberal” to denote all seculars). Their ideas are often also not explained in detail.

Perhaps, as Northrop Frye (1957) claims, the novel is not the appropriate medium for such political/philosophical inquiries unless they can be readily translated into tangible personal relationships. In this thesis, I will explain that some authors present an individualistic or liberal idea. In other words, they stress some of the tenets of individualism I have outlined above. Moreover, in doing so, they are answering with an oppositional discourse to the other two dominant intellectual trends of left-wing nationalism and Islamism. This is a very simplistic rendering of significant historical and philosophical ideas, but it is a convenient tool for the interpretation of novels.

V. Individualism and the literary genre of the novel

Efforts to define the novel have sometimes described it as a form of literature that concerns itself with a society of changing classes and narratives of social climbers. Nancy Armstrong (2006) feels that the novel as a genre reflects the life of people who "cannot inhabit the social position into which they have been born" (349). Both she and Watt (1957) explain how Robinson Crusoe is the prototype for novels exhibiting economic individualism, with Armstrong taking issue with Crusoe's defence of his property. Robinson Crusoe is exceptional in that he can "manage quite on his own" and his "egocentricity condemns him to isolation wherever he is" (Watt, 1957, 86). Watt feels that solitude is the most important aspect of Crusoe's narrative and explains why he feels the associated psychological problems in the novel must be subordinated to economic goals. Solitude is an important theme in all the novels in this thesis, but it is viewed as a choice made by characters that have subordinated family, friends and romantic priorities to other goals. Watt argues that the hubris of economic man explains the rejection of poverty in the modern novel. It is important to mention that the novels in this study present their ideas on economic individualism in more indirect ways than the simple narrative of prospering economically and safeguarding one's possessions. At times, the failure to prosper is used to highlight the importance of economic mobility. At others socialism as an ideology is critiqued. At other times, social mobility is presented as more complex than mere economics, with factors such as cultural relationships with the West, degree of literacy and learnedness, ideologies of movements and political parties endorsed, connections to power and sometimes religious affiliations being presented as intricately definitive of the concept of class in the Arab world. Social climbing in the novels in this study will manifest in other ways besides the career story; in fact, the absence of the career story will be an interesting phenomenon to explore given genres (such as the Bildungsroman, the autobiographical novel) are often defined by their presence. Lionel Trilling (1981) predicted this evolution when he noted that "social class and the conflicts it produces may not be any longer a compelling subject to the novelist…ideological society has, it seems to be, nearly as full a range of passion and nearly as complex a system of manners as a society

based on social class" (259). The question of what novels are accomplishing by omitting the career story will be examined.

Armstrong (2006) argues that the novel as a genre promotes the idea that those excluded from the mainstream of society (because of socio-economic place, race, gender…etc) can make their way to its centre. She is critical of how modernist novels "imagined society from the view point of those excluded from the moral core" (385). Her ideas echo those of Lukács (2006), who recognised the tendency of modern novelists to place what he viewed as "abnormal" humans, without a social being, at the centre of culture; a tendency which he disapprovingly considered to demonstrate "undisguised anti-humanism" (404). The degree to which the characters in this study can be considered marginal will vary. However, they will all seem unique because the microscopic lens of biographical writing, as Lejeune (1989) noted, makes less "sophisticated" individuals appear worthy of narration (132).

This leads to the problem of the real individuality of this individual hero of the novel: to what extent are the characters psychologically authentic, rounded, and do reflect real personalities rather than symbols and larger themes? In other words, are unique, individualistic characters a character type? Despite his autonomy, the romantic hero is an archetypal character for Frye (1957). Watt (1997) presents the structures of this archetype: he analyses the individualist lure of characters such as Crusoe, Faustus, Don Juan and Don Quixote, who have an "excess" of individualism (IX). Each of these "monomaniacs" obsessively pursues a goal; this makes him stand out from the rest of the crowd. It is their monomania that differentiates them from other famous egotists and self-centred men; for example, Julius Caesar. For Faust, the search for knowledge opens a Pandora's Box to his individualist ego. Watt (1997) analyses how this myth of education and intellectualism gave an unfulfiled promise to the individual; a crisis suffered by many characters of the novels included here. As for Don Quixote, he is consciously mad, self-centred, capricious and domineering. Significantly, Don Quixote's adventures may be a motive to "rise in the social scale" (72). Don Juan and Don Quixote are ambitious; they want to become legends and to do so they have to break accepted social mores. Don Juan did just this, but he was not a "conscious skeptic, atheist, or rebel" (102). In other words, it was not a matter of principle,

it was just a pleasurable game. As mentioned above, Crusoe is the hero of economic self-sufficiency.

Watt (1997) describes both the negative and positive aspects of this individualistic character type. On the negative side, the hero has no family ties and no home. He is free of national or local loyalties, does not concern himself with religion and has no love for mankind. His positive traits, according to Watt, are that he is tenacious in maintaining his point of view, ceaseless and active in his search for experience. These qualities make him appear "unheroic, though not unattractive" to his audiences (210). However, Watt insists that the audience changed; his central argument is that in the eighteenth century Romantic authors such as Rousseau and Goethe reinterpreted these texts and made them more heroic, individualistic and mythical than they were originally intended.

The Sixties' generation of Arab writers are known to have launched attacks on social realism because of its implied rejection of psychoanalytic interiorisation of characters.[29] Trilling (1981) attacks social realism that teaches readers that "we ourselves are not creative agents and that we have no voice, no tone, no style, no significant existence" (253). Marxist critics, such as Lukács (2006) and Benjamin (2006), have critiqued novels that place too much emphasis on individuality, on man's uniqueness and the unbridgeable chasm between private man and his larger society. Bakhtin (1986) has a distaste for biographical novels in which the abstract, unchanging individual plays too great a role, fails to react to his social environment or display "any true process of becoming" (17).

The debate about the novel as an individualistic genre entails an analysis of its presentation of human autonomy. For René Girard (2006), the characters' autonomy is an illusion. In his theory of triangular desire, modern Man, burdened by pressures to be autonomous and original, convinces himself that he desires an object that another a mediator possesses. It is the mediator that gives the desired object its prestige. Whereas believers offer sacrifices to gods for the deity's enjoyment, subjects offer mediators objects so they can rival them and confer prestige on them. This process causes much suffering;

[29] See al-Kharrāṭ (1993) and Kendall (2006).

jealousy, envy, rivalry, all stemming from an illusion. Girard analyses how Don Quixote, the "individualistic" hero of the world's first proto-novel, randomly chooses the fictional Amadis to serve as a motive for his adventures. He discusses how mediators differ in their closeness to the hero, and how the authorial tone of handling triangular desire varies as well; the author may present it satirically, comically or tragically. In Girard's opinion, the greatest novel of all is one that obliterates the object and focuses on the mediator. Girard's ideas on the split self are relevant to this study because, in all of the novels, doubles or mediators play an important role and exemplify triangular desire. As Dumont (1986) claims, "envy is the psychological accompaniment of the (individualism's) equalitarian claim" (79).

Underlying the critiques of Armstrong, Watt, Lukács and others (Walter Benjamin, 2006, singles out the Bildungsroman genre for a similar attack) is the notion that the novel is a genre that privileges a bourgeois worldview. This is a recurrent criticism that I will address, as it relates to my thesis on budding individualism in the contemporary Arabic novel. Firstly, we must ask whether it is so undesirable to narrate the problems of the middle class, as they usually constitute the majority of any society and its centre. Armstrong (2006) criticises "the fiction of bourgeois morality" in the novel while deploring how the genre aims to be inclusive of those who would be deemed misfits in reality, a position that is itself "paradoxical."[30] For my purposes, the larger issue of what would constitute the middle class in the Middle East presents itself. When Lejeune (1989) speaks of the genre of autobiography in France as a middle-class genre, he mentions his narrators as business owners, employers, industrialists, leisurely travellers…etc. The scholar of autobiography finds himself having to defend his choice of this bourgeois genre as a field of study: "autobiography, like all genres, is a historical fact, but I maintain that its thematic commitments are not entirely so and that 'bourgeois consciousness' does not explain everything about them" (Lejeune, 218). Doris Lessing also felt that she had to defend her choice of the genre of the Bildungsroman for her novels claiming that although it was not fashionable that does not mean there was "anything wrong with this kind of novel" (cited in Abel, Hirsch, Langland, 1983: 191). I will

[30] The title of her article is *The fiction of bourgeois morality and the paradox of individualism*.

reiterate Lejeune's objection that brushing aside a genre's ideology as a reflection of mere middle-class concerns is in itself questionable. I will also add that in other countries, certainly Arab countries, the middle class itself is not what one would consider privileged or elitist. It is a class that consists of:

> Educated Middle Easterners who had moved into the white-collar ranks of the civil service and the professions as well as the educated Middle Easterners who aspired to those ranks but could find no room in them…Until the 1950s that much education would have qualified the recipient for a comfortable if unglamorous white-collar job, a decent standard of living, and a modicum of prestige. That is no longer the case…[Young people] are being offered make-work jobs or no jobs, salaries that lag behind inflation and low social status…It is reasonably clear that this age-group contributes significantly to various kinds of radical movements…[but] are just as likely to be migrant workers…as they are to be political activists (Richards and Waterbury, 1996: 100).

In the same vein, Frederic Jameson (2006) attacks the hypothetical citizen of first-world countries who has the privilege of avoiding history and retreating into private life, in contrast to individuals in developing countries for whom (he claims) politics is inevitable. The problem with such an opinion, as Jacquemond (2008) notes, is that it contributes to the exoticisation of the peripheral novel by valuing it for its documentary, political and controversial themes rather than its literary value or at times the values that are current within peripheral intellectual circles[31].

The most interesting metacriticism of the idea of the novel as bourgeois genre or the novel as a (successful or failing) narrative of social ascension is made by Bruce Robbins (2006). He claims that a novel with negative view of upward mobility echoes with aristocratic values; it is pervaded by literary irony and is portrayed as a "refined" narrative, whereas a positive view of upward mobility in a novel is considered "crude" (429). He reveals how artists and writers, by forming what he considers a bohemian community, have attempted to align themselves with the aristocracy against a society of middle-class values: "from its origins on, the novel abounds in stories that are told from the point of what we can call, with studied vagueness, the upper classes, and that look down with mild ridicule or moralistic contempt at someone who is trying to escape from his or her natural, predestined social place" (Robbins, 2006: 421).

[31] See Jacquemond's (2008) postscript on the contrast between the cult novel and the bestseller (232-236).

Revealing this bohemian theme to recur in literature from various cultures, he appropriately cites the example of Ṣaliḥ's (1966) *Mawsim al-Ḥijra ilā 'l-Shamāl*. This novel serves as a prototype in the fifth chapter of my thesis and it is significant that its protagonist and most of the characters in this study (or their envied doubles) personify this bohemian myth. Robbins sees the loss of bohemia as "no less inevitable then the passage from youth to maturity," a theme common in biographical novels (417-18). Robbins would no doubt see Musawi's (2009) critique of some canonical Arabic Bildungsromans as no "more than a rising petit bourgeois narrative of aspiration" as an example of this ridicule. The biographical novels in this study are written from the point of view of travellers, political activists or intellectuals, a category that manifests certain bohemian if not upper-class traits. Again, upward mobility in its strict socioeconomic sense is notably absent from the novels, with authors showing differing opinions on it. Often, the character and/or the implied writer elicit the biases of an educated elite who show a similar "moralistic contempt" towards social climbers and the simple religiosity of the masses.

Finally, just as there are criticisms of the novel as an individualistic genre, there are equally committed voices that celebrate the novel as a by-product of individualism. Bakhtin (1973) glorified the polyphonic quality of good novels; the novel has a democratic style that allows individual, conflicting voices and opinions of characters to be heard in one artistic medium. Authors such as Saghie and Abi Samra (2001) betray liberal biases by regretting the lack of individualism in Arab culture on the basis that artists, poets and novelists are motivated by nationalist and leftist ideologies and are "thinkers," intellectuals, ministers, journalists rather than artists (Abi Samra, 2001, 158). However, the individualism of authors is not as relevant to my own study as the individualism of the heroes of their novels. Whereas writers may didactically use novels as a podium from which they preach their ideas, liberal or otherwise, characters in novels, for the most part, "make no pitch for any individualist idea; they do not support individualism ideologically or politically; they merely assume it for themselves" (Watt, 1997: 276). In other words, they are individualists in the extreme sense; they struggle for their own sense of unique individuality and, in most cases, do not care if other people do the same. These ideas will become

clearer as I describe the three sub-genres of the novel with which this study is concerned.

VI. The biographical genres: towards a definition of the Bildungsroman, the autobiographical and the confessional novels

> Bildung is an ideology of pragmatic individualism (Castle, 2006, 13).
>
> It is possible to conceive of a type of literary history that has an accurate perception of the genre spectrum…that is able to identify the dominant genre…and to explain how they attained that position of dominance-as well as how they cross-fertilise, or impoverish or conflict with neighbouring genres; that is able to show how the genre spectrum may vary from one period to another and how the cultural assumptions of an era are reflected in the hierarchy of genres; and that is able to illustrate the process of change itself through reorderings of generic hierarchy or the proliferation of new forms, or alterations in the cultural perceptions of genre. It would be possible, in this context, to speak with some precision about the ideological functions of genre, about the conditions of possibility for the existence of particular genres, and the reason for their flourishing or decline (Duff, 2000, 18).

Before I present my description of each of these genres, I must begin with a caveat. Attempting to define a genre inevitably encounters many difficulties and limitations. The problems associated with dealing with genres as static systems have been well documented by genre theorists.[32] Modern genre theory acknowledges that genres must be treated as ever-changing forms; consciousness of genre begins as its conventions are being challenged. This process by which novelists become more aware of genre conventions plays an important role in understanding the evolution of the biographical forms in this thesis. In this section, I discuss common themes, motifs and structural elements of these three genres, but it will become obvious that they are not set in stone. They change as historical contexts do, and they are not all present in all novels within a given period.

Lejeune (1989) encounters a related issue that "generic definition seems to pose a kind of insoluble problem, a sort of vicious circle: impossible to study the object before having defined it, impossible to define it before having studied it" (121). In other words, genres do not exist prior to the process of selecting their representative works based on certain criteria, which are then used to define the genre. The primary sources of this study were selected because they highlight narratives of selfhood. After this initial vague selection of criteria, some common characteristics became evident; thereby allowing me to omit and add

[32] See, for example, Duff (2000).

certain works. In many ways, the following description and definition of biographical genres was reached after my selection of novels. Lejeune elaborates that “the academic study of genres, as scientific as it might be, is involved, in its own way, in the institution; it often plays a part in constructing or in consolidating what it claims to analyse or describe” (141). Furthermore, the very term “biographical genre”, which I choose to represent those three significant genres may come into question by those who consider them distinct despite their similarities. Others, such as Bakhtin (1986) in his study of the Bildungsroman, place the autobiographical novel and the Bildungsroman under the biographical novel as a larger category in a similar manner to my own.

But these problems of definition do not make studies of genre futile. Bakhtin (2000) acknowledges that a genre is maintained even as it consistently parodies and criticises itself. Certain elements of genre become problematic within a new ideological make-up. Forms experience more changes and receive more insults with every inflection in writers’ ideas. However, ideological shifts become apparent precisely because there is a convention to travesty and there is model of the genre to take down. So, even though genre is not static and its conventions are visible only in retrospect, genre as process provides a significant analytical tool. It is in relation to these shifts in ideas that the fluidity of the three genres becomes less problematic in terms of the thesis on the individual in contemporary Arab fiction. By focusing on novels’ implied values, my summation of three genres into a larger umbrella genre becomes more understandable as an interpretive tool. One practice in which I will not try to engage is making any one novel fit within one of the three genre categories: it would be impossible and unnecessary for the purposes of seeing the novel as an example of intellectual developments. It is less important that the categories are defined clearly than it is to consider them, as Derrida (2000) would, as participating in a genre rather than belonging to it.

Regarding the three genres that concern me here, there are particular problems related to the boundaries between them. Among the many border issues between the genres of the Bildungsroman and the confessional, for example, is that while the classical Bildungsroman displayed a linear chronological narrative from childhood to maturity, a typical confessional novel

had a circular structure with characters returning to some point of origin.[33] However, modernist narrative experimentation broke up the linear narrative thread in the Bildungsroman and in the process blurred the boundary between the confessional and Bildungsroman genres. In the confessional novel, the hero's inner thoughts decide the order and importance of events; we may be shifted into memories and then into fantasies with no proper warning. The author of the confessional novels always manipulates narrative time to extenuate the internal time of the hero.[34] Castle (2006) highlights a similar trend in the evolution of the Bildungsroman genre by the end of the nineteenth century, where "[o]ften what we find are ensemble narratives in which Bildung plots are embedded and thereby re- or decontextualized by a larger narrative structure that contains them" (192). He elaborates that a modern Bildungsroman can exist "in the absence of certain narrative tropes - the repression of childhood, of parental influence, of education" (140-1). What then is the real difference between a Bildungsroman and a confessional? If narrative is put aside, the difference must lie in the goal of the novel: is it self-perception (function of confession) or self-development and social integration (functions of Bildung)? As Castle's (2006) work fully explicates, the modernist Bildungsroman always "fails" on self-cultivation and social integration. The confessional novel, as we will see below, also "fails" on self-perception. I argue that no matter what the original differences between them, since the turn of the twentieth century the Bildungsroman and the confessional novel have essentially become very similar genres.

Lejeune (1989) finds himself in a similar dilemma in his famous attempt to distinguish autobiography from fiction in the autobiographical pact. Autobiography is "retrospective prose narrative written by a real person concerning his own existence, where the focus is his individual life, in particular the story of his personality" and "a contract of identity that is sealed by the proper name" (4, 19). If the author, whose name appears on the cover of the book, is the same as the narrator and the main character in the book, this can be classified as autobiography. For example, Rashīd al-Ḍaᶜīf's (1995) *'Azīzī al-Sayyid Kawābātā* (one of the novels in this study), in which the author, narrator

[33] See Castle (2006) and Axthelm (1967) for a comparison.
[34] Axthelm (1967)

and character are all named Rashīd is a reflection of this definition; however, it is a Rashīd that witnesses his own conception, birth, death and narrates from the afterlife. Lejeune's definition would classify al-Ḍaᶜīf's narrative as a lie, but that would be missing the point. Similarly, Khālid al-Birrī's (2001) autobiographical work (in which author, narrator and character have the same name) is prefaced with his contention that it is to be read as an autobiographical *novel (sīra dhātiyya riwā'iyya*). For al-Birrī, the act of writing a narrative by rearranging facts and manipulating history to present arguments and unify themes makes it fiction. Writing fiction, as opposed to autobiography, gives this author power. In *Dhākirat al-Jasad* (1988), the use of the author's real name confirms her identity, but her life is narrated from the perspective of a fictional character, Khālid. This is a rare narrative technique in which the author constructs a point of view on the self by becoming the narrated instead of the narrator. In autobiography, "the referential pact can be, according to the criteria of the reader, badly kept, without the referential value of the text disappearing (on the contrary)" (Lejeune, 1989: 22-23). Lejeune does not elaborate why the lack of resemblance to reality can make an autobiography even more valuable; however, I can conjecture that it points to the autobiographer's ability to invent, alter, create and manufacture reality and invites questions about the reasons the writer made such decisions. Sometimes, it is the fiction in autobiography that makes it valuable. He speaks about how recent autobiographical writing is hesitant, fragmented and "full of holes" (27). Moreover, he suggests that, in autobiography, the "author proposes to the reader a discourse about the self," and an answer to the question "how I became who I am" (124).

All of these characteristics of autobiography, as described by Lejeune, are shared by the modernist Bildungsroman and the confessional novel. Appropriately, Castle (2006) states that in the Bildungsroman, the biographical events that occur are unimportant, compared with the process by which the narrative structures subjectivity. Sandra Frieden (1983) also recognises the relationship between autobiography and the Bildungsroman from their emerging popularity in the eighteenth century, when they developed alongside each other and " acted as complementary counterparts of the same expressive role: the fictional and non-fictional account of the individual in his…development, in his struggle to integrate himself, his ideals, and his

perspectives into an increasingly industrialized, materialistic, and alienating bourgeois society" (305). She adds that in the late twentieth century, with truth and fact continually being questioned, the boundaries between the two genres became hazy.

Most novels are plotted on characterisation. Plot is not action alone; rather, it is a synthesis made by the author that involves character, thought and emotion. Hale (2006) claims that some of the sources of any novel's unity derive from the "path out of self-blindness to self-awareness" and "a process of oscillation between self-blindness and insight and back" (9). Lukács (2006) believes that great literature's true purpose is "the realization of the complete human personality" (345). As Watt's (1957) analysis of the rise of the novel above suggests, the intricacies of personal character are what came to define the novel as a genre in the first place. This places an element of aesthetic Bildung (the idea of one's unique personality as a product of one's intent and creativity) and confession at the heart of all novels. The genres that interest us, however, make self-awareness and self-cultivation the *primary* goals for their heroes and heroine. They are genres based on self-narration.

Bakhtin (1986) regards the Bildungsroman as distinct from other biographical novels in that it presents "man in the *process* of becoming" (my italics, 19). He then distinguished separate subcategories of the Bildungsroman: there is a cyclical type in which predictable internal changes take place as a person ages and the world is presented as an experience or school. Another type is one in which biography passes through "unrepeatable, individual stages…Emergence here is the result of the entire totality of changing life circumstances and events, activity and work. Man's destiny is created and he himself, his character, is created along with it" (22). Then there is the didactic-pedagogical novel of emergence. In these types, man's emergence happens against the backdrop of an unchanging world (events do take place but the foundations of the world are unchanged): "the world, existing and stable in this existence, required that man adapt to it, that he recognize and submit to the existing laws of life" (23). In the most significant type of Bildungsroman, "man's individual emergence is inseparably linked to historical time…he emerges alongside the world" (23). Man must change alongside a world which has changing foundations. Bakhtin's idea raises an important question regarding the author's presentation of the

world. It will become evident in the coming chapters that most of the authors do not construct a dynamic universe that is significantly changing with time; rather, a world that remains profoundly unchanged despite the character's youthful desire to transform it.

A confessional novel is one where a protagonist lives through a process of self-discovery. This process can be an intentional one: the heroine embarks consciously on a project of self-awareness, sometimes addressing her readers or even defining the objectives of this project. Other times, the readers of a confessional novel feel that they have accidently overheard the confessions of a protagonist who may not even be aware of the nature or the purpose of her journey. More often, the hero's levels of awareness and intentionality vary throughout the work. Axthelm (1967) presents the history of the evolution of the confessional novel from its origins in religious confession. He provides a discussion of the origins of confessional writing, from Augustine to Dostoevsky. He shows how the modern confessional novel attempts to find redemption for a hero who cannot resort to God for spiritual fulfilment and who cannot strive towards a better afterlife. The modern confessional hero does not usually begin his journey with a set of definite values and, if he does, he undoubtedly begins to question them throughout. Perhaps because of these religious influences, the confessional hero suffers chronically and may even enjoy his own pain. But unlike religious confession in which the confessor's primary objective is absolution, the confessional novel's hero does not look outside the self; indeed, his individuality and dignity provide the "principle" for his existence (Axthelm, 18).

Furthermore, Axthelm reveals how originally religious confessional writing resolved inner conflicts by turning outside the self towards purgation. This sentiment is transformed in the modern confessional novel, where the hero, in his extreme isolation, must find perception "related to the world at large, not to any one companion" (62). For the character to place himself against the world is not necessarily to be antisocial (although many confessional heroes certainly are just that), but it defines oneself existentially outside the realm of social relations. The characters in the novels in this study often try to do this by allying themselves with movements and ideas, or by struggling to free themselves

from their socially-determined place; thereby creating what Castle (2006) calls a non-identitarian self.

A Bildungsroman is a novel in which the protagonist aims to perfect his existence as a whole and autonomous human being; one that is complete spiritually, intellectually, and successfully functioning as a member of society. In its most classic form, the Bildungsroman is narrated chronologically, often starting in the hero's childhood and ending at a stage of maturity or death. The hero exists invariably within a society in which he attempts to cultivate himself through education, vocation, marriage and other social relations. He aspires to *be* something; he is in a process of self-construction and creation. Needless to say, to mature is to know oneself to some extent, and to know one's abilities and limitations. The classical Bildungsroman had a balanced position regarding Man's place in the world. Man could be a perfect human being through knowledge, experience and he could also be a social animal. There was no contradiction between these two goals; in fact, to be a perfect human you must achieve status within your society. Louis Dumont (1986) defines Bildung as "freedom in community", which can be fulfilled only in a liberal society that respects the ideal of self-cultivation.[35] Many scholars agree that the classical Bildungsroman is culturally and historically specific; yet the term is used to describe novels from other regions and eras.[36] To resolve this issue, Harmut Steinecke (1991) proposed using the term "Individualroman" to release the genre from its confined historic context in German literature and nationalism. Although I agree with his proposal, I will maintain the use of the term Bildungsroman in my thesis because the neologism Individualroman has not been used frequently in the literature. It is still possible to widen the definition of Bildungsroman by stressing its "ideology of pragmatic individualism" and its basic themes: it is a novel that describes a life of character from youth (or childhood) to a more mature period, presents a narrative of attempts to reach intellectual or spiritual goals and degrees of conflicts between a character's inner life and the practical affairs of the world (Castle, 2006: 13). In general, a Bildungsroman can be regarded as a novel that displays the:

[35] See his discussion of Bildung as the form of individualism associated with German Romanticism (Dumont, 1986, 133-4).
For a summary of the debate about the specificity of Bildung to German culture, see Hardin (1991).

> Humanistic concept of shaping the individual self from its innate potentialities through acculturation and social experience to the threshold of maturity……It does not matter whether the process of Bildung succeeds or fails, whether the protagonist achieves an accommodation with life and society or not....the concept of Bildung is intensely bourgeois... There must be a sense of evolutionary change within the self, a teleology of individuality, even if the novel, as many do, comes to doubt or deny the possibility of achieving a gratifying result…it carries with it assumptions about the autonomy and the relative integrity of the self, its potential self-creative energies, its relative range of options within material, social, even psychological determinants (Sammons, 1991, 41-2).

Castle (2006) elaborates on the emergence of what he calls a "pragmatic Bildungsroman", where the sole aim of the hero is the ascension of the social ladder (disregarding intellectual and spiritual development) and the description of a career story similar to Lejeune's (1995) autobiography of success. Finally, the modernist Bildungsroman brings back the original focus on aesthetic Bildung. Unlike his classical predecessors, the protagonist of the modernist Bildungsroman never manages to strike the balance: he faces the choice between abandoning his dreams to "find a niche in the world" in order to blend in with his community, or going into exile of some kind in order to remain true to his autonomous self (Axthelm, 1967: 74). The irresolvable conflict between the inner and outer worlds is the underlying characteristic of the modernist Bildungsroman. Franco Moretti (1987) sees that there is no "synthesis" between youth and maturity in the Bildungsroman; there must be a compromise, which is the Bildunsgroman's "most celebrated quality" (9). He differentiates between two types of Bildungsroman plot based on the opportunity cost of compromises. One type of plot is based on the *classification principle,* which places all meaning in the ending; the other is the *transformation principle,* in which the ending is open and life rendered meaningless. Marriage is important in the first type; adultery in the second. Happiness is emphasised in the former; freedom in the latter. It becomes apparent in the majority of novels in this study that the classification principle becomes absent; thus, denying the possibility of social integration and happiness. The freedom of the transformation principle, however, is either evasive or bittersweet.

There is a dialectical relationship between self-awareness and self-construction; character or personality are constructed, they are not self-same or continuous. As a hero knows himself more, he is able to make something of

himself, act on the product of his reflection, and build on the basis of what he believes he has “found out” about his pre-existing self. In other words, “confession is a stage in the Bildung process” (Castle, 2006: 173). Similarly, the act of knowing something new about oneself is itself an act of creating the self; bringing to light something that was not previously there. It is thinking an aspect of the self into existence. Confession often entails recalling memories to explain and justify one’s character and decisions and, in the process, narrate a story of maturity and growing awareness. So, when novels appear to partake in more of one genre, subplots relating to the other are nearly always present.

The Bildungsroman and confessional novels are placed at a crossroads between inner and outer planes. Although their heroes are often isolated in some form of exile, there is a thwarted desire for action. Axthelm (1967) shows that the most accomplished confessional novel is one in which the hero ultimately acts in his world based on his achieved perception. However, to conclude his work on the confessional novel on such a note is indeed to admit that there is a sort of mission for the genre; that is, for the hero to exit the realm of reflection and enter that of action. In other words, the perfect confessional novel-for Axthelm, is not “circular” as a whole, no matter how many circles it contains, for it maps out a nonlinear journey from the trapped, claustrophobic consciousness of modern man toward harmonious existence in the outer world. Evidently, Axthelm’s perfect confessional novel desires to be a Bildungsroman, where inner culture is developed for the purpose of “freedom in community” (see above). In some ways, Castle (2006) shows that the modernist Bildungsroman sometimes has the inverse of this as a goal: “[t]he aim of the modernist Bildungsroman is to put into play a Bildung process that harkens back to the classical mode, in which the goal is inner culture, but also inevitably confronts the impossibility of … a unified, harmonious relationship with the social world” (67). This impossibility is due to several reasons, most importantly the issues of class, gender and race involved in the very idea of Bildung.[37] These narrative tendencies are particularly prominent in novels by female writers in this study. In *Ḥikāyat Zahra*, Ḥanān al-Shaykh’s (1980) mentally unstable Zahra struggles to fit into her community through a highly confessional

[37] See critique of individualism in the novel above.

narrative. Meanwhile, Mīrāl al-Ṭaḥāwī's (2010) Hind in *Brooklyn Heights* is on a (failed) path of self-development characteristic of a pragmatic Bildungsroman (through rural, urban and international travel, through writing, marriage, divorce, independence) but falls short of significant self-awareness.

By emphasising women's lack of opportunities, the female Bildungsroman originated as an attempt to offer a feminist critique of the male narrative of aesthetic and pragmatic self-cultivation. Therefore, whereas in the Western novel the modernist Bildungsroman of males presented failures as a critique of the older tradition of classical Bildung, the female Bildungsroman was structured on the heroine's failures from its inception.[38] Sandra Frieden (1983) discusses how in the contemporary Western novel, a woman may be depicted as free from her traditional domestic roles and may enjoy more mobility but familial ties persist in her consciousness in comparison to narratives of male heroes. In my study, I find the same dynamic in the late Arabic novel. While many female heroines are practically free and mobile, their memories of their parental and conjugal families haunt them and prevent self-development. Parental families play a less significant role in the majority of male narratives, whereas conjugal families are completely absent from the text (either because the hero never marries or because his wife and children are rarely mentioned). Interestingly, Frieden notices a trend in the 1980s, whereby individual growth (in its classical sense) as an emphasis returns to the Western Bildungsroman (male and female). This is the same decade where a similar trend also presents itself clearly in the Arabic biographical novel.

Perception, social integration and inner harmony are what readers of the two genres expect characters to accomplish by the end of the novel; they comprise the organising principle for selection of narrated events and the end to which the narrative aspires. Yet the two genres never entirely live up to these reader expectations. The protagonists seldom end up gaining full perception or actualising their personal and social aspirations. Although the protagonist of a confessional novel is always introverted, it is possible for her to be introverted yet static, with no psychological development. Castle's (2006) primary contention is that, because the Bildungsroman is structured to "take the shape

[38] See Abel, Hirsch and Langland (1983).

of human subjectivity", it is always bound to fail (64). Axthelm (1967) describes how the confessional novel moves in circles in which the hero experiences awareness only to lose it again. Nowhere is Shoshana Felman's (2006) idea that self-knowledge infinitely deferred clearer than in these two subgenres of the novel. Consequently, what defines the confessional novel is not what is revealed about the character but "the process of a man learning for himself who he is" (Axthelm, 27).

The similarities between the genres are prominent in scholars' description of recurrent motifs, and it is on these that I will focus in the coming chapters. For example, the motif of the literary or artistic representation of the self: Castle (2006) analyses the scroll in *Wilhelm Meister*, the painting in *Dorian Gray*. Axthelm speaks of kept diaries and novels in the making within the novel. Lejeune (1989) describes the autobiography itself, the one we read, as the product of this self-representation. Sometimes it need not be an art work per se, but a vision: the girl wading in the water for Stephen Dedalus in *Ulysses*, or Tadzio for Gustav von Aschenbach in *Death in Venice,* [39] or for Clarissa in *Mrs. Dalloway*, her own biography.[40] Then there is the double or foil, a motif that is present in all the novels in this study and, without which, Axthelm (1967) insists no confessional novel exists.

Both genres are rife with themes of exile: forced exile, self-imposed exile, prolonged periods of travel, mysterious disappearances. Experiences of love, sex and marriage are crucial to both. Nedal al-Moussa (1993), Issa Boullata (1976), Roger Allen (1995) and many others have explored how in the early Arab versions of these genres, relationships with both Western women and women from their native cultures came to exemplify the Arab intellectual's excruciating position between tradition and progress, East and West. This motif is used repeatedly in the post-1967 novel by both male and female writers to challenge the premises of these early works, as I will demonstrate later.

Another similarity is the character type of the protagonist. The biographical novel traditionally privileged certain types of men, and in the more contemporary cases certain types of women as well, who were travellers, activists, artists, writers and intellectuals. In other words, characters that may

[39] A work that is alluded to in al-Birrī (2010).
[40] See Castle's (2006) chapter Female Bildung for an elaboration on *Mrs. Dalloway*

exist in Robbins' (2006) idea of literary bohemia were, and still are, widespread in the genre, although other literary types have been added. Castle (2006) explains how privileged liberal and aesthetic education were themes in the original design of the classical Bildungsroman and became its problematic in later stages, where more 'ordinary' protagonists (unemployed people, waiters, teachers, desk clerks) become prominent. Confession, according to Frye (1957), is a type of prose fiction in which "a technical discussion of a theory of aesthetics forms the climax" (308). As explored in the following chapters, one might add that a resolution of an ideological or political issue may also form the climax. Axthelm (1967) describes the hero of the modern confessional novel as:

> Afflicted and unbalanced, disillusioned and groping for meaning…he rejects external rebellion in favor of self-laceration…After *Notes from the Underground*, this hero becomes increasingly intellectual, capable of philosophical meditations and prone to literary allusions…he never loses his huge capacity for suffering and is constantly torn by violent emotions and uncontrollable compulsions (9).

The degree of the perception that the hero may realistically attain depends on his character and his mental and intellectual capabilities. Stephen Meyer (2001), for example, criticises an Arab novelist for creating a character that "strains the credulity of the reader" by being a simple villager who travels to the city, yet able to indulge in a complicated process of self-diagnosis and "have this degree of understanding about his own character…[that] detracts from the confessional nature of the text" (199-200). Therefore, the level of intellectual awareness and nature of philosophical musings must correspond to the character's mental capabilities. Any real and complete understanding of the hero is ultimately the task of the savvy reader rather than the hero himself. This is characteristic of a transitional period in the biographical genre, where the reader is clearly expected to recognise the character's autonomy and responsibility while the character himself cannot. Different novels address this dynamic using various narrative techniques that maintain distances between the hero and the reader.

One of the more problematic techniques for our savvy and psychoanalytical reader is objective narration. Meyer (2001), in his analysis of some contemporary confessional novels, sees that the prevalence of this technique among Arab novelists reflects their failure to produce an introspective narrative.

But objective narration is not incommensurate with confessional writing: Axthelm (1967) affirms that many confessional novels present heroes that have a heightened awareness of detail while being emotionally unavailable. Lejeune (1989) explains the advantage of autobiography in the third person as purposefully keeping the reader at a distance. This repression of emotion and distancing has several functions: the author may want to reflect the repression felt by the hero, or the subtext may be repressed by the author (to emphasise its complexity, oppressiveness, or danger…etc). The narrator is not the only present person in a confessional novel; the implied author is always there to manage our access to the subject. An Arab writer's choice of objective narration in a confessional novel does not mean that introspection is a "luxury of Western modernists", as Meyer claims, only that for the purposes of this confession, the author did not give the reader access to the subject's introspection (193).

In light of the comparison between the genres, it is vital to mention how the ending of narrative plays a role in genre definition. Peter Brooks (2006) is fascinated with the "the narratability of life", and the pleasurable processes by which narrative detours delay the desired end to produce "illumination and blindness" in the novel. This "paradoxical" position of narrative between the length of its own duration and its anticipated end is achieved by "vacillations" of perception, which ultimately result in a figurative or literal death (332). This relationship between perception, illumination and blindness, and death or failure is an important dynamic in reading the confessional/Bildungsroman. Many modernist Bildungsromans end in death[41]. Death is symbolic: it signifies the impossibility of the exercise of individual will wholly in the social world. This bleakness is paradoxically heroic because it exalts the journey during which the protagonist followed the ideal of self-cultivation, regardless of the failure of his attempts (125). A failure at the end of a Bildungsroman is a "critical triumph" for Castle (2006: 71).

In Lejeune's (1989) studies of autobiographies of the nineteenth century, he found that narratives that problematised the success of the career story had something in common with the Bildungsroman:

[41] See Castle (2006) and Abel, Hirsch and Langland (1983).

> Is it success that creates values, or value that creates success? Are they compatible or incompatible? This is the same problem found at the heart of…the novel of apprenticeship in particular…those who succeed find that all is right in the world. The others have more complicated attitudes; is it the world that is going wrong, or them?...between the exemplary autobiography of the employer who has succeeded and the militant autobiography of the employee is found a continuous range of intermediate and sometimes ambiguous texts…discourse of equality masks the circumstances in which the hierarchy was constructed…[successful autobiographers] are so proud of their success and so willing to believe both in their own value and in that of the system" (172-3).

Therefore, the assumption is that a narrative of failure would reveal disbelief in the system. However, nearly all of the novels included in this study do not offer any simplistic or formulaic answers to questions about reasons for individual failures. One important thing to mention here would be Robbins' (2006) idea that a negative view of upward mobility is perceived as a "refined" narrative and a positive view of upward mobility in a novel is considered "crude" (429). This might explain one of the reasons why the only story ending on a positive note in this study (*al-Dunya 'Ajmal min al-Janna,* al-Birrī, 2001) is also the one that leans more towards autobiography than it does to fiction (more to fact than to literariness).

Genres are concerned with predictions. They provide writers with models of writing and define reader expectation. In a Bildungsroman, the reader expects a character to experience certain transformations from youth to maturity. The absence of such a transformation, given that other structural aspects of the genre are maintained, disturbs reader expectations and invites him to engage more with the text. It will be my aim in the coming chapters to trace how aspects of the biographical genre transformed over the period of study and attempt to explain the significance of these changes.

Frederic Jameson (2000) takes issue with genre criticism that assigns an essence to the spirit of particular genres, denying any inherent meaning in generic structures. He criticises attempts to study genre by "rewriting a body of varied texts in the form of a single master narrative" (Jameson, 2000: 180). I concede that this is what I am doing in the coming chapters, but I must state that I feel that this exercise, though insufficient, is necessary. Primarily, it confirms the existence of a narrative that has not been given significant scholarly attention. The second logical step after this would be to historicise the

master narrative and explain its philosophical and sociopolitical significance which this thesis does only briefly. This is the ultimate and perhaps long-term task of a study of genre in a historical period; however, it does not diminish the importance of the preliminary step of describing the characteristics of the genre (as much as this is possible) and explaining the ideological meanings that the genre acts in portraying. Jameson (2000) considers the merits of models of genres to be in deviations from the structure and proposes to study these deviations contextually and historically. This is somewhat contradictory since studying deviations acknowledges the logic of an original structure. Where we would agree would be in considering genres as limiting situations and a study of genres as a functioning model of intertextuality (Duff, 2000).

To reiterate the common characteristics at the intersections of the three genres outlined: qualities and traits of the protagonists, their portrayal of self-development, creative self-representation and autonomy, the presence of doubles, and the discourse on failure of the character. These intertextual aspects will provide the foundations for my discussion of the biographical novels in this study.

Chapter Two: Methods of Studying Intertextuality

In this chapter, I aim to summarise the theoretical concepts relevant to my method of analysing texts in relation to each other. I refer to contributions to scholarship on intertextuality that are pertinent to this thesis. In the interest of brevity, many of the terms and concepts will be greatly simplified in order to facilitate their usage as tools of interpretation. This means that many contentious debates within scholarship on intertextuality will be downplayed in order to enable the ideas produced to apply, with practicality if not precision, to a study of a literary genre over a significant historical period.

To begin with, it would be useful to disambiguate the two (most prevalent) conceptions of the term "intertextuality" in circulation. The first refers to Julia Kristeva's (1981) idea of intertextuality, which refers to the presence of one text within another. Gérard Genette (1992) calls this "classic intertexuality" (81). Quotations, allusions, plagiarism would be "intertexts" under this notion. The other idea of intertextuality is less limited, and refers to all discourse that links texts to each other and the links between texts and other discourses. The "intertext," in this case, includes any discursive practice outside the text that engenders it and other texts. Jonathan Culler (1976) speaks of "presuppositing" of cultural codes and practices that takes place in the writing and reading of texts. Intertextuality is understood to be the result of these presuppositions.

In reality, most discussions about intertextuality alternate between these two meanings. For example, Kristeva, considered one of the founders of the theory, begins by discussing the textual word as ambivalent: "an intersection of textual surfaces rather than a point (a fixed meaning)…[it is] a dialogue among several writings, that of the writer, the addressee (or the character), and the contemporary or earlier cultural context" (65). She regards "history and morality written and read within the infrastructure of texts" that is "constructed as a mosaic of quotations" (65-6). In her seminal work on intertextuality, Kristeva attempts to show how texts come to being from pre-existing written and cultural texts rather than from authorial intention. However, when describing such ambivalence as found within literature, the resulting analysis justifies Genette's description of her idea as "classic":

> [I]mitation…which takes what is imitated…seriously, claim(s) and appropriate(s) it without relativizing it. A second category of ambivalent words, *parody* for instance, proves to be

> quite different. Here the writer introduces a signification opposed to that of the other's word. A third type of ambivalent word, of which the *hidden interior polemic* is an example, is characterized by active (modifying) influence of another's word on the writer's word. It is the writer who "speaks" but a foreign discourse is constantly present in the speech it distorts. With this active kind of ambivalent word, the other's word is represented by the word of the narrator (or the character)…Examples include autobiography, polemical confession…The novel is the only genre in which ambivalent words appear; that is the specific characteristic of its structure" (73-4)

Kristeva's complication of the traditional literary devices of influence, imitation and parody maintain the author's intentionality in the creation of the ambivalent word, even while emphasising the act of narration, by presupposing another constitutes a "shift from subjectivity" (74). Jonathan Culler's concept of presupposition better embodies this ideological value implied in the theory of intertextuality: the idea of the subject as created by an intertextual web of written, heard and lived material.[42] However, Culler (1976) understands that such a theoretical idea will meet challenges in literary studies: "The decision to use only one text to constitute the intertextual space of another is revealed as a decision made for the purposes of interpretation and not as a motivated axiom of the theory of intertextuality" (1388). It follows that a shift in the understanding of the dynamics of relationships between texts resulting from the theory of intertextuality may still result in a critical study in which one text is read in relation to another and varying degrees of authorial intention in references to other texts is likely. This is a characteristic of the method adopted in this dissertation: I refer to the intertextual space of the contemporary novel by comparing between a limited number of texts and their predecessors. This method is applied for convenience and does not imply that the intertextual web is confined in any way to the selected texts.

This study attempts to trace ideological trends in the infrastructure of the period of study by examining how biographical novels, whose characteristics are described broadly above, presented the individual. The novels are linked not only through the narrow definition of genre, but also through a wider intertextual infrastructure. I will try to demonstrate how each novel is written and read through its relationship with already existing texts. As an interpretive tool, I

Graham Allen's (2000) work on the ideological implications of different notions of intertextuality provides a comprehensive analysis of this point.

will use famous genre-founding, canonical texts as prototypes to describe this intertextual network.

A canonical novel often epitomises reader expectations of a genre and demonstrates a writer's literary and genre competence. My selection of these canonical texts is based on their ability to best exemplify this literary competence (a concept that I will elaborate on below). This is, in addition to their status as novels that have been widely read, been written by established authors or have recurrent presence in literary scholarship on the Arabic novel as exemplified in textbooks or anthologies of Arabic literature. Therefore, reading other texts within the same network as this prototypical novel means constantly comparing, seeing references, allusions, similarities and also noting what is missing, has been omitted and transformed. I will show in the coming chapter how in earlier novels, writers participated vaguely in this network while, in later cases, authors self-reflexively adapt, transform and parody the canonical novels or the infrastructure that engendered them.

I mentioned above Bakhtin's (2000) ideas about genre's maintaining their features in spite of consistent efforts by novelists to break with convention. He observes that "throughout its entire history there is a consistent parodying or travestying of dominant of fashionable novels that attempt to become models of the genre…this ability of the novel to criticize itself is a remarkable feature of this ever-developing genre" (72). Critique, imitation and parody are literary and artistic techniques that predate the novel.[43] Kristeva (1981) argues that the presence of a narrator produces a *hidden interior polemic* where the writer's words are always modified by a "foreign discourse" (74). Narrators of biographical novels in this study often represent a discourse that the implied author views unfavourably, and when the main character and narrator are different individuals, a third discourse is frequently critiqued. Interestingly, to exemplify this tension between the author and the narrator evident in hidden interior polemic, Kristeva (1981) mentions autobiography and confession.

Kristeva's ideas are more helpful to my study when considered in conjunction with Wayne Booth's (2006) idea of the implied author and reader. Booth discusses how the literary work manipulates the reader through the

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Gérard Genette (1997) discusses a history of various types of commentary of one text on another such as parody, travesty, caricature and other related categories.

decisions of the author to reach the moral framework set out by the latter. The reader can thus reach conclusions about the values implied by the author's choices. The author is "implied" because these values may change from one work to another. In this study, many works show that the implied values of the author are opposed to those of the narrator and/or character. Often, the narrator represents a prevalent discourse, usually that of the sociolect, entrenched cultural norms or the canonical texts, that the author maintains a critical distance from the implied reader; this strategy results in the hidden interior polemic that Kristeva notices in the biographical genre. The more mature the novel, and the later it is written, the more intentional and outspoken it becomes as a parody of the "fashionable novels" or the canons, which I use as prototypes.

As literary genres are never precisely defined, by using these prototypes I in no way mean to underestimate the existence of even earlier prototypes or the relevance of other literary events that affected this corpus. Rather, I present cannonical texts that exemplify reader expectations about the genre. I have explained above that the re-emergence of biographical novels post-1967 and their emphasis on character's autonomy and responsibility can be considered as a manifestation of a general intellectual climate that rejected the populist rhetoric of independence movements prevalent in the Fifties and Sixties. If one attempts to trace the cultural codes related to each of the themes in the next chapters, one can go back much further than the Sixties. The travel novel builds on a literary tradition of travel to the West that predates the fourteenth century. Arab nationalism as political activism has origins in the nineteenth century. By choosing literary prototypes in the Sixties, I am effectively summarising ideological and cultural trends that were a long time in the making. But I feel that choosing these prototypes is important. Firstly, there is the essential interpretive convenience of limiting a period of study. Secondly, this dissertation focuses on the *novel*, so while many of the themes discussed were important in other areas of Arab culture, they fall out of the scope of this study. Social realism in the novel became the "royal genre" of the Fifties and Sixties, so it is that era that is directly relevant to an exploration of the biographical novel's reaction to the values that social realism embodied (Opacki, 2000). It is important, therefore, to focus on what the characteristics of the novel were

immediately prior to this period rather than going back to its origins in the early twentieth century.

That said, I will now proceed to highlight some of the relevant aspects of the theory of intertextuality that have aided me in interpreting my selected texts. I will summarise briefly the concepts of several theorists of intertextuality and genre that assisted me in evaluating the works. I will begin with Genette's (1992, 1997) elaborations on the aspects of textuality. I refer to Riffaterre's (1981, 1985, 1994) limiting view on intertextuality, on the concept of literary competence (also important for Alistair Fowler, 1982), and his definition of sociolect. A discussion of Culler's (1978) presuppositions, Bakthin's (1986) speech genres, and Barthes' (1977) seminal ideas on the already read and cultural codes will adequately cover my methods.

I. Gérard Genette and literature in the second degree

The importance of Genette for my analysis of the contemporary Arabic novel is in his model of the aspects of textuality in literature. He identifies several of these. *Transtextuality*, or the *textual transcendence* of a literary work is all that sets it into a relationship with other texts. Under this come types or "functions" of transtextuality. *Intertextuality,* as I mentioned above, is the actual presence of one text within another, a function that will be elaborated on below. *Metatextuality* is the relationship between texts and critical commentary on them. *Architextuality*, which is of great interest to this thesis, includes (but is not limited to) the relationship between the text and the genre it belongs to. It is "the entire set of general or transcendent categories, types of discourse, modes of enunciation, literary genres from which emerges each singular text." (Genette, 1997: 1). *Hypertextuality* is "a process by which a hypotext A is transformed into a later hypertext B." A work's hypertextuality stresses how it is derived from other, previous texts. This is an aspect of literariness that is vital to this study. Finally, *paratextuality* is the actual text's relationship with what sets it or delineates it (titles, book covers, forewords…etc).[44]

Genette stresses that these aspects, though identifiable, overlap. Examples he gives are architextuality being recognisable through paratexts, such as "an autobiography" or "a novel". Metatextual critiques make use of intertexts such as quotations. Importantly for me, hypertextuality in the form of parody or travesty of previous texts is itself a form of metatextual criticism. Groups of hypertextual works constitute genre or architext, and so on.[45]

It is significant that, in most of Genette's analytical examples, hypertextual relationships between texts mostly involve a degree of authorial intention (in rewriting or referring to an earlier hypotext), although Genette does recognise the existence of unintentional parodies or hypertexts. He feels that "the hypertext at its best is an indeterminate compound" (1997: 400). In the subsequent chapters, I study contemporary novels that are such "indeterminate compounds" and largely unintentional hypertexts of earlier hypotexts. Allusions

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See Genette (1992), 81-83 and Genette (1997), 1-7. Note that some of Genette's definitions of these terms, particularly architextuality and paratextuality, changed in the latter work. I adhere to the more recent definitions.

[45] See Gennette (1997), 7-10.

and parodies may not be of the specific hypotext or prototype that I mention; they refer to the cultural and political assumptions represented by the hypotext. Therefore, I use Genette's model to interpret relationships between texts in ways that he does not, although his work theoretically covers my method.

Genette's work is significant for its meticulous analysis of types of hypertextual *transformations*. He criticises the confusion surrounding terms such as "parody" and attempts to disambiguate them. He finds three usages for the term parody in literary criticism:

> In the first case, the "parodist" diverts a text from its original purpose by modifying it only to the degree required; in the second case, he transposes it completely into a different style while leaving its subject as intact as this stylistic transformation allows; in the third, he borrows its style in order to compose in that style another text treating another, preferably antithetical subject (1997: 12).

He proposes using the term "parody" in instances where minor changes to the hypotext are made in order to convey a new meaning and "transposition" in cases where broad stylistic changes are made instead.[46] Travesty, a form of transposition, is "more satirical and more aggressive vis à vis the hypotext than is parody" (1997: 27). Hence, Genette would disagree to my usage of the term "parody" in the coming chapters to describe hypertextual novels' relationships to their predecessors. He would call *Raqṣa Sharqiyya* (al-Birrī, 2010) a travesty, even a burlesque travesty, of *Mawsim al-Ḥijra ilā 'l-Shamāl* (Ṣaliḥ, 1966). The latter novel can also be considered a mock heroic that uses the noble register of the traditional *riḥla* and a "high" or lyrical literary style to treat "lowly" erotic content, a recurrent literary phenomenon that Genette calls the "erotic grand style" (141). *Raqṣa Sharqiyya*, on the other hand, transposes by "borrow[ing] from a celebrated text, and the travesty consists of transposing it into vulgar style. This transposition affords the reader a supplementary pleasure, which comes from identifying at every moment beneath the travesty the text that is being travestied" (142).

These precise comparisons between hypertexts and their literary precedents are interesting and would provide a richer understanding of the dynamics of genre. However, the purpose of this study is to focus on the changes to the cultural text that is indicated by hypertextual transformations. The work of the

[46] See, for example, (1997), 10-12.

coming theorists is more relevant in this matter. For this reason, I find that such detailed attention to the types of parodies is not useful or necessary. The vast majority of hypertextual links I analyse are unintentional; therefore, they involve major transposition of previous themes, styles and structures. Thus, I use the word parody in the broad sense, to signify the conscious, aggressive and satirical handling of the values implicit in the earlier instances of the genre. In that sense, *ᶜAzīzī al-Sayyid Kawābātā* (al-Daᶜīf, 1995) overtly (consciously, aggressively, satirically) parodies the discourse that engendered novels, such as *al-Bāb al-Maftūḥ* (al-Zayyāt, 1960), without necessarily intentionally having this specific hypotext in mind. This concept of parody is more useful for my purposes.

In his discussion of architextuality, Genette (1997) insists that it is "silent" (4). That is, the text's relationship to its genre is not pronounced, except through the occasional paratextual reference. The work's belonging to a genre "is not the business of the text but that of the reader, or the critic, or the public" (4). However, he feels that that relationship is what should concern poetics; therefore, he would be agree with Todorov (2000), although the latter places more emphasis on the study of genres as "bring[ing] to light the constitutive features of the society to which they belong" and history (200). As I will elaborate below, Jonathan Culler (1976) also feels that the study of the relationship between texts leads inevitably to a study of genre. In short, a study of the intertextuality of literary productions is usually tied to their participation in genre, or their architextuality.

II. Alistair Fowler's concepts of genre and their transformations

Fowler (1982) suggests that genres be treated as tools of communication about literary texts. Like many theorists of genre, he feels they do not work as systems of classification. Critics should "identify genre to interpret the exemplar" (38). Hence, for Fowler the common characteristics between texts enable us to read (or write) other texts that we believe belong to the type with better "competence"; a concept that is also important for Riffaterre (1978).

Fowler explains how young children learn to recognise stories through play, and children's stories help them learn narrative, and so on. He wants a study of genres to "catch [generic competence's] acquirement in the act" (44). The competence to read complex literature can take place gradually after the reader "assimilates" more simple forms. Furthermore, readers acquire competence "almost as if they were forming a hologram from scattered traces" (45). He explains this to mean that readers may learn about literary genres from genres outside literature, such as cinema, advertising..etc. This relationship between the building blocks of literature and the experiences of the real world are elaborated in Bakthin's (1986) ideas, especially his concept of "speech genres," to be summarised below.

Genres are also identifiable in their distinction from other "neighbouring" or "contrasting" genres (45). For example, I use the concept of the biographical novel as a contrasting genre to the social realist novel, but as an umbrella genre that encompasses neighbouring types such as the Bildungsroman, autobiographical and confessional genres. Moreover, in this thesis I identify two separate subgenres of the biographical novel. For example, I claim that the subgenre of the biographical *travel* novel transforms into a *migrant* novel in contemporary Arabic literature. I contend that this is the case in major literary works, although it would be an interesting question for further research to explore whether the Arabic travel novel (where protagonists travel only temporarily and finally return to their country of origin) has not survived as a minor or neighbouring genre.

Fowler explains some of the common problems in the study of genre. He identifies the two outlying trends in genre studies that he considers impractical: the synchronic and diachronic description of genres. In the former, genre is

described in terms that do not change and in the latter it changes with history so often “without waiting long enough for generic generalization” (49). His proposal regarding this problem is one I endorse; an unchanging “broad generic outline” that goes through transformations as “historical accommodation is required” (49). In the next chapter, I claim that there is a subgenre of the Arabic novel in which a person embarks on a journey of self-development and discovery by joining a political movement. This characteristic is maintained from the first novel I select (*al-Bāb al-Maftūḥ*, al-Zayyāt, 1960) to the last one (*al-Dunya ‘Ajmal min al-Janna*, al-Birrī, 2001). However, elements within that subgenre reveal changes that correspond to historical moments. Whereas the earlier instances of the genre demonstrate a harmony between the inner culture of the main characters and the mass movement in which they participate and tend to end on a note of freedom in community, the latter narrate *beyond* this point to show failure of collectivist movements and the irreconcilable differences between the individual and the group. Also, whereas the political movements in the earlier novels tended to be nationalist and/or socialist, the last novel features a character participating in an Islamist group. I suggest that these changes in genre correspond to historical events, such as increasing economic liberalisation, wars between Arab countries and civil strife in addition to the advent of Islamism. These historical events manifest in the content of the work and in *changes of scale* in generic attributes (see below). Sociopolitical realties changed some features of the subgenre, while others pertaining to its specific biographical description are maintained throughout.

Furthermore, Fowler emphasises the problem of genre identification being retroactive and literary works being subject to regroupings into different genres. He believes that if genres are understood as types with changing boundaries and as tools for communication about literature, this should not undermine their importance to criticism. He then proceeds to list some of the constituents of literary works that allow the reader to interpret them within a framework of genre. He mentions *generic allusions*. A work may refer to a line of works that it sees as its precedents, prompting the reader to approach it with those previous works in mind. Fowler acknowledges that “many generic allusions are unconscious…made prominent by repetition” (90). In this thesis, I claim that sexual liberation in a Western country has become a constituent of the

contemporary travel novel that prompts numerous generic allusions (intentional and otherwise). Fowler (1982) also mentions titles of works, opening formulae and topics as constituents of genre.

He elaborates on the death of genre. This occurs either when the genre ends in an historical period, or when it suffers from "automatisation" and "banality" after having been "played out" too often (164-5). Applying this concept to this study, the *riḥla* is a genre that no longer exists.[47] Some of its constituents such as the search for knowledge and the return journey were revived in the earliest Arabic novels, but these also became "played out". Thus, the contemporary novels that present the topic of travel rework other aspects of the early novels, while the constituents of travel for knowledge/study and the return home have diminished importance.

Fowler claims that this type of pattern shows that the kind must evolve to survive. The more formal the definition of a genre, the more likely it is to be tied to a specific social and historical context. The more it relates to *modes*, which he claims are looser generic constituents, the more likely they are to remain in circulation. He elaborates that "old structural conventions disappear altogether. On the other hand, the contents of a discontinued kind may survive…as long as they retain human value" (169). Fowler would consider my discussion of genres in the next chapters a discussion of *modes* because most of the constituents relate to content rather than form. Again, a change of terminology would not greatly add value to my methods because the novel as a literary genre is itself a very loose structure, and efforts to define it formally have rendered no workable definition.[48] The generic constituents listed, such as the presence of a *Dopplegänger* and the failure of characters to reach goals, are sufficiently numerous to identify and interpret a type of novel. Fowler's distinction between form and mode is more apt to assist a study of other genres with more tangible structural aspects, such as poetry, epic…etc.

Fowler's (1982) most relevant ideas to this study pertain to the transformations of genre. He describes various processes through which genres change. I often focus on changes of scale, where certain attributes of the previous form are magnified or diminished in more recent works. Fowler

[47] See Shihibi (2009) for a definition and a history of this classical literary genre.
[48] See Hale (2006).

believes the diminution of a constituent, *brachylogia* (which I refer to as "minimisation") is "more interesting…complex, in condensing it must find ways to suggest the original features not explicitly present" (173). *Macrologia* (I use the term "maximszation") allows more expansion on constituents. Fowler notes that even small changes of scale can have great consequences for meaning. A constituent may be omitted altogether, a device which he feels is used when the genre reaches a "late stage" (173). These simple descriptions of generic transformations are very useful as tools of analysing the shifting implied values of authors.

Fowler looks at other processes, such as the introduction of new topics and the combination of repertoires of different genres. In the following chapters, I show how in the contemporary travel novel the new topic of political activism abroad features as an addition to the content. This can be found in Ḥanna Mīna's (1983) novel, for example. Moreover, the theme of travel abroad features as a minor constituent in many biographies of political activists. He shows how genres develop through counterstatement, where a work is considered an antithesis of a previous one. He feels that a specific work that is to be considered a travesty or a burlesque is meant to "exaggerate generic features to absurdity, or juxtapose them with contraries" (175). However, an *antigenre* emerges when the opposition is not aimed at a certain original. He would consider, for example, that the biographies of political activists that I present are antigenres to the genre that *al-Bāb al-Maftūḥ* participated in, because they do not seem to be directing their attacks to specific literary works (al-Zayyāt, 1960). However, works like *Raqṣa Sharqiyya* seem to betray a high awareness of the literary works to which it is opposed, and is therefore more of a burlesque (al-Birrī, 2010). I reiterate that this difference is perhaps inevitable, as travel novels can claim a more entrenched literary convention than novels about political activists. Such categorisations aside, Fowler's ideas prompt us to consider how the writer's consciousness of literary tradition affects the work.

An interesting concept noted by Fowler is the hybridity of genres, where two or more component genres exist in relatively equal importance in a work. In this study, I have contrasted the genres of social realism and biographical fiction. However, it is easy to think of novels that are hybrids of the two. Novels where characters have little autonomy and are constructed as products of social

forces (constituents of social realism), but present a character's interior monologue in depth and show character development (constituents of biographical narratives) come to mind. Many of the selected novels that I have given reduced importance in this study would fall in that category. The relationship between confession, autobiography and the "royal genre" of social realism in the Arabic novel is an important topic for further study.

III. Bakhtin's analysis of speech genres and utterances

Bakhtin describes the process by which language, in the neutral form of word or sentence, is transformed into a personal *utterance* in the speech of individuals. A word passes through the neutrality of language, through somewhat stable "speech genres" and into the particular utterance of a unique individual. The concept of speech genres is important in understanding the discursive context out of which emerges each selected novel (each complete utterance) in this study.

Speech genres pertain to the language associated with different categories of human activity. Every "sphere of activity contains an entire repertoire of speech genres that differentiate and grow as the particular sphere develops" (Bakhtin, 1986: 60). Speech genres can be detected in the themes, styles and composition of recurrent utterances in a specific kind of human activity; they are "the drive belts from the history of society to the history of language" (65). Bakhtin explains that human beings are fluent in several speech genres in practice without being aware of their existence. In entering a conversation about any topic, we draw on a wealth of material from the speech genres that incorporate this topic in order to form our own unique utterance. Speech genres are not created by speakers, they are givens. Bakhtin is emphatic that the existence of these stable speech genres, determined by the entire history of utterances that form the way of speaking about a topic, does not diminish the individuality of the speaker. On the contrary, "the better our command of genres, the more freely we employ them, the more fully and clearly we reveal our individuality in them…the more flexibly and precisely we reflect the unrepeatable situation of communication" (80). This is because, although speech genres are stable, they "submit fairly easily to re-accentuation" by the individual (87).

When a speaker chooses a word to employ in his or her utterance, they do not select it from a dictionary but from a repertoire of previous utterances. In spheres of human activity, certain authoritative utterances are assimilated by the speaking individual and each "epoch" and "social circle" sets the tone or style of the speech genre: "our speech, that is, all our utterances (including creative works), is filled with others' words. Varying degrees of otherness or

varying degrees of ‘our-own-ness’" (88- 9). Bakhtin emphasises the speaker’s place as a link in a chain of communication about the topic. This topic “does not become the object of speech for the first time in any given utterance…[it[has already been articulated, disputed, elucidated…Various viewpoints, world views, and trends cross, converge and diverge in it” (93). A speaker “presupposes” all the previous utterances on the topic about which he is speaking (69). Consequently, from the very beginning of an utterance, the speaker expects a response from his audience and the speech is constructed to encounter this response. Utterances are inherently dialogic, characterised by “internal dramatism” (96). Therefore, Bakhtin sees the hypertextual devices of imitation, parody, travesty…etc described above in every sphere of human communication. Generic allusion, as described by Fowler (1982), factors in Bakhtin’s model as a facet of all human interaction.

Bakhtin differentiates between primary and secondary speech genres Primary speech genres can be found in “unmediated” everyday speech between people. Secondary speech genres “absorb and digest” primary speech genres and then develop them into more complex constructs; a process by which the primary genre’s immediate relation to reality is diminished. Bakhtin conceives of secondary genres as ideological genres. In secondary speech genres (to which all literary and artistic production belongs), the speaker “plays out” primary speech genres in order to enter into a dialogue with them. Moreover, the author’s individuality is reflected in her stance on related secondary speech genres, particularly previous works but also all “speech communication in that cultural sphere” (75). Bakhtin refers to examples in sociopolitical life. The words “peace” and “freedom” are neutral, but have acquired particular intonations and connotations because they have entered a “socio-political speech genre” (85). Any author using “Peace!” and “Freedom!” enters into a dialogue framed by this speech genre with which the addressee is familiar and can utter her unique view.

For Bakhtin, the type of speech genre determines the degree of individuality assumed by the utterance. For example, in military communication the individuality of the speaker is greatly subdued. However, in “artistic literature” the “main goal” of the secondary speech genre is the reflection of the individuality of the speaker (63). In other secondary speech genres, the

individuality of the speaker is a by-product of speech. However, in literature, individuality enters into the very "intent of the utterance" (63). A novel, a complete utterance in Bakhtin's theory, is distinguished by the individuality of its authorial intent.

Bakhtin's ideas in his essay on speech genres are vital to an understanding of the relationship between the selected novels in this dissertation. In the following chapters, there are two "topics" that the authors of the novels are speaking about. When an author forms an utterance on political activism, he is indeed engaging with various primary speech genres (ordinary people's every day conversations on the topic of activism) and secondary speech genres (other novels, history text books, political commentary) related to it. These speech genres contain all the ways of speaking about these topics that are prevalent in the writer's society. So, when I claim that the fictional activists' political views oppose Western colonialism or capitalism, for example, I do so because that is presupposed in the primary and secondary speech genres on political activism in the "epoch" of post-independence in Arab countries and within the "social circle" of intellectuals, journalists and creative writers (Bakhtin, 1986: 88).[49] This is the case even when there are no elaborations or clarifications on the protagonist's political views. They are elements of the topic with which the addressee, or reader, is familiar. Each writer's individual utterance then forms a unique perspective on the presuppositions inherent in these stable speech genres.

The same logic applies to the other topic of this dissertation: travel and migration. This topic is accumulated out of an extensive reservoir of primary and secondary speech genres. Ways of speaking about travelling in everyday life ("I am excited to see new places", "I feel estranged abroad", "I want to leave this place," "I feel discriminated against in a foreign country," etc) are some presupposed utterances of the primary speech genres absorbed into these novels. The author's intent is to respond to these prevalent ways of which the public conceives and speaks about travelling. Furthermore, as I explain in that chapter, each author's utterance contains within it a response to rich literary

[49] See Kendall (2006) and Jacquemond (2008).

and extra-literary conventions; the secondary speech genres that encompass the topic of travel in literature, cinema, music and other cultural productions.

IV. Jonathan Culler on the place of presupposition in intertextual approaches to literature

Jonathan Culler (1976) proposes solving some of the challenges that face intertextual methods by focusing on presuppositions suggested by texts rather than their sources. He emphasises that writing exists as a product of prior knowledge of authors and is comprehensible only through the prior knowledge of readers. However, this prior knowledge is not "known," "intelligible" or immediately present.

> This is not essentially or even primarily a question of the writer knows, certainly not a question of what he has in mind, for the relevant presupposing may be deeply sedimented in his past or in the past of his discipline…indeed it is a characteristic experience that one's presuppositions are best revealed by another…[by] thinking from the point of view of another" (Culler, 1381).

Culler is particularly concerned about the problem of "application" of theories of intertextuality. He stresses the theory of intertextuality's important contribution: the concept of the lack of sources or codes (because they are lost, forgotten) for literary texts and social conventions as constituents of the culture of readers and writers. This important contribution, however, is lost in actual intertextual studies.

To clarify, Culler presents two oppositional ideas of intertextuality. The first approaches intertextual space as a site of struggles within tradition, or a struggle by new poets against the authoritative premises of canonical works.[50] The second, on the other hand, sees intertextual space and the codes it contains as infinite. I would say my approach in the coming chapters is an intermediary one between these two, and one Culler would call "application". Therefore, I use the prototype in each chapter for "interpretive convenience" to reveal the prior discourse that it presents (1388).

I claim that a prototypical text is canonical, not only because it is an authoritative text that has influence on the intertextual space in which an author produces her work, but also because the work itself is an efficient approximation of the codes, themes, styles, etc in that intertextual domain. In other words, my prototypical works can be considered representative of the

[50] Ideas extrapolated from T.S. Eliot's (1919) Tradition and the Individual Talent.

most important elements of discourse present within an intertextual space; thereby justifying their use as precedents. This approach encompasses the idea of new artists struggling with literary tradition but includes more than this; it is an attempt to summarise a literary tradition in a single text (or two, in this case) in order to study how new works transform it.

Culler proposes removing the intentions of authors from the study of intertextuality to avoid the problem of using prior texts altogether. He uses sentences or fragments (from poems) and explores what they presuppose. In my study, I do something similar by isolating certain motifs (the sexually available white woman, the unified identity of the nation) and analysing their presuppositions. Motifs, however, are not a part of “natural language” to which Culler directs us in his intertextual approach. A motif is literary, and hence has already been incorporated in previous literary texts (secondary speech genres). Culler hints at thinking about “prior poetic discourse” instead of a single prior text in the reading of poems, but it would be inconvenient to do this without offering the reader an example of this discourse (1390). Hence, an analysis of a literary motif takes one to its prior presences within texts, or else the study becomes “evasive” too (1387). To describe “prior poetic discourse” or the discursive space in which novels are written, one can list elements of this discourse, discuss their significance and take an agreeable or oppositional stance. All of this would be made more concrete, however, if one can present the reader with a text that embodies the kind of prior discourse that one is describing. I agree with Culler that this is not “crucial” because these prototypes “function as already read, they present themselves as already read by virtue of the simple fact that they are presupposed” (1392). It is not crucial, but it is easier and more convenient.

V. Barthes' already-read cultural codes

Jonathan Culler's analysis inevitably leads us to Barthes' (1977) seminal ideas on the already-read quality of texts. The text and the subject, for Barthes, are constituted by all the texts and codes of society.

> The occurrence of the code is for us essentially cultural: codes are certain types of *deja-vu,* of *already seen, already read, already made:* the code is the form of this *already* which is constitutive of the writing of the world. Although all the codes are in fact cultural, nevertheless there is one of those we have encountered which we shall call preferentially *cultural code:* this is the code of knowledge, or rather of human knowings, of public opinions, of culture such as is transmitted by the book, by teaching, and in a more general, more diffuse way, by the whole of society. This code has as its reference knowledge, insofar as this is a body of rules elaborated by society (Barthes, 1977).

Barthes' different codes are reminiscent of Bakhtin's speech genres; they are stable forms that reflect society's rules, stereotypes, public opinions and ways of speaking. All of these conventions form the subject in Barthes' theory.

Unlike Bakhtin, however, Barthes diminishes the role of authorial intention in the study of texts. While Bakhtin believes a novel is an utterance of its writer that comes to an end when he finishes his speech plan, in Barthes the novel is a text with no borders. It is a text unbound by authorial intentions, and if it is a good "writerly" text, challenges cultural norms and codes.[51] In the Bakhtinian model, the novel is always characterised by "internal dramatism" (Bakhtin, 1987: 96).

I will not attempt to tease out the differences between Bakthin's and Barthes' theories.[52] The similarity between Barthes' conception of the already-read codes of culture that are brought to the text and Bakthin's emphasis on an utterance already containing remnants of previous utterances is pertinent to my intertextual analysis of novels. The reader will sense that I am more inclined to Bakhtin's appreciation of the individual input in the utterance. In this study, I conceive of novelists as constituting a social circle that operates in a common intellectual sphere and communicates in given speech genres. By analysing novelists' works, including but not limited to their authorial intentions, I can draw

[51] See Allen (2000), 76-94 for a discussion of this.
[52] Allen (2000) has offered a satisfactory comparison between these theorists and others.

conclusions about changes in the thought and the codes of that particular social circle. Bakhtin insists that every utterance, particularly artistic and creative utterance, uses stable speech genres (codes, doxas…etc) but transcends them because it is infused with the individuality of the speaker. His model allows us to apply the concepts related to Barthes' already read codes while considering the methods with which the author responds to the prior discourse that those codes represent. It is, however, important to mention Barthes as well as Bakhtin in this study because of his influence on other intertextual work (such as that of Culler above).

VI. Riffaterre's ideas on the literary competence of the reader and limited intertextuality of literary writing

A recurrent idea in theories of intertextuality is that readers are able to interpret texts and authors write them as they have acquired the necessary competence from the prevalent sociolect and the language and style of previous texts they have read. The presuppositions of the text reveal that the "reader is familiar with the structures organizing a representation of reality… these are the very stuff of our linguistic competence" (Riffaterre, 1981: 239). This implies that although specific intertexts and literary sources that originate that organising structure may be lost, a reader who is "competent" because of adequate knowledge of the sociolect, those already-read cultural codes as they manifest in language, and literary language and devices, may be able to mentally reproduce some hypothetical precedent.

Readers recognise features of the text that appear to conform to the sociolect or to the inherited and prevalent norms of society. Riffaterre refers to this as the "grammaticality" of the text (Riffaterre, 1981: 1994), adding that literary writing tends to undermine the sociolectic and emphasise the idiolectic which are the "two coding systems" of literature; an opinion that resonates with Bakhtin's views on creative speech genres (Riffaterre, 1984: 159). Therefore, all literary writing is a form of reaction to social norms by "assimilation or rejection or parody" (160). As such, moments when stereotypical representations of the world are challenged are immediately recognised as "ungrammatical" by the reader and can be used as keys to unlock the meaning of the text. The inter-text for Riffaterre, then, constitutes the conventional norms and codes of society from which the text emerges in order to decode and resignify. And the act of reading, or interpreting what is read, comes down to becoming "conscious that the idiolect is substituting other systems of meaning for the sociolect's system" (Riffaterre, 1994: 228).

The theorist attempts to show how competence applies to readings of texts. Readers have been taught to pay attention to certain signals; for example, recurrent symbolism (that eventually become clichés) or repeated thematic elements in different poems. When a reader encounters such a signal, he is aided in the process of connecting it to the text's "generic features" (1981). To

demonstrate my own literary competence as a reader, I have pointed out certain recurrent “signals” that hint at the organising structure of biographical novels (abstract individualism, spontaneous desire, failure and compromise, envy embodied in doubles…etc). A novel that possesses several of these features invites a competent reader to compare it to other such novels. A novel handling the topic of travel to the West invites the competent reader of Arabic literature to recall all his knowledge of the cultural stereotypes about travellers and foreigners in addition to what he has encountered in other literary texts about this popular literary theme. The points where, in this study, the contemporary novels have departed from that norm, have demonstrated that they are an “ungrammatical reverse of a sociolec[t]” (Riffaterre, 1981: 239) have allowed me to interpret the meaning they convey.

It is this competence in the recognition of these signals that are peculiar to literary texts that allows Riffaterre to insist that intertextuality is a limited and workable concept.[53] Whereas other kinds of texts (for example, scientific reports) are expected by the reader to refer to reality, literary writing is non-referential (even given social realism’s claim to represent or critique reality). A reader “is not at liberty to avoid” the literariness that is “dictated” by the text (Riffaterre, 1994: 781). This often works because the reader is compelled to fill in gaps (a missing component ordinarily present in other similar texts) and interpret the ungrammaticalities of the text. This process leads Riffaterre (1994) to the definition of intertextuality as “a structured network of text-generated constraints on reader’s perceptions” (781).

Riffaterre’s methods have been debated by many critics.[54] For example, he feels that a “seasoned critic” (Rifattere, 1981: 234). has done the necessary readings to guide him on a specific reading path which raises questions about readers coming from different cultures or historical periods. It might not be possible to be as categorical as Riffaterre about the precise, undebatable and unavoidable interpretations of texts. However, his idea that a reader uses signals to relate texts to a given sociolect, to literary and non-literary conventions and to detect ungrammaticalities is important; one can say that readers will go on many different paths and stop at different signals in the text

[53] See, in particular, Riffaterre (1994).
[54] Allen (2000) provides a good analysis of objections to Riffaterre.

without the process of interpretation Riffaterre describes being seriously undermined. For me, Rifattere's description of interpretation also describes the act of writing. The writer is a reader of previous texts, capable of recognising the sociolect in her own text and of writing (with varying degrees of consciousness) ungrammatically.

This short summary of the problems presented by an intertextual approach in no way ends the debates (such as the use of prior texts or methods of determining acquisition of competence in an intertextual study). It is only an attempt to show an awareness of the limitations of such a method, as well as the opportunities for the understanding of genres that it presents. The benefits of this method I have chosen lie, to quote Culler (1976), in its

> Focusing on conditions of meaning in literature, it relates a literary work to a whole series of other works, treating them not as sources but as constituents of a genre, for example, whose conventions one attempts to infer. One is interested in conventions which govern *the production and interpretation of character, of plot structure, of thematic synthesis, of symbolic condensation and displacement* (my italics, 1394).

These italicised words summarise the approach to the selected novels in this study employed to ascertain their participation in generic conventions, describe some of their transformation and evolution, and note the challenges posed by these generic changes to established social and literary codes.

Chapter Three: Prototypical Narratives of Political Activism and their Fictional Character Types

I The architext of political activism in Arabic literature

Jacquemond (2008) explores how creative writing in the Arabic novel (and, specifically, the Egyptian one) was an extension of and substitution to political and social critique, to the extent that the literary field could be described as an "osmosis" of politics and literature (36). Fiction in the Arab context became inextricably entrenched in ideological and political matters and as a result there was often a moralistic or didactic function for it. Jacquemond describes a gradual process of reversal that took place after 1967. In this chapter, I will use Genette's (1997, 2000) concepts to show how the prototypical biographical novel of the political activist developed as an *architext* of this characteristic of Arabic literary writing. I will do this by introducing some of the generic attributes that became intertexts in later novels. I will elaborate on the character type of the political activist as the primary component of this intertextual infrastructure.

The architext of the fictional activist's biography emerges out of a reservoir of cultural codes that will be analysed below. Archetypal political activists reflect the progressive circles of Arab intelligentsia and artists; they endorse ideas of Arab nationalism, socialism and anti-Western sentiments as discussed in the previous chapter. In his survey of modern Arabic literature, Badawi (1993) mentions many Egyptian, Lebanese, Syrian and Jordanian writers with Marxist, socialist and nationalist ideas, but the plots he summarises of many of their works do not describe the lives of characters with economic or political struggles but instead narrate the life of intellectuals who belong to a certain elite in the Middle East. The narratives that result have elements of Robbins' (2006) literary bohemia, which in Middle Eastern countries also carry an aura of idleness and sexual permissiveness, as Jacquemond brilliantly captures in his description of Cairo's literary gatherings. These are among the characteristics that become traits of the protagonists in this chapter and his or her Bildung process involves maturing past this stage of life. The details of the traits and lives of these character types will be shown in this chapter.

Every author has a certain morality but not necessarily a commitment to a cause. The concept of '*adab* as didactic literary writing, as Jacquemond

demonstrates, survived different periods of time and applies to various ideologies. ‘*Adab multazim* (literary commitment), by contrast, was always associated with Marxist or socialist, and post-colonial ideologies. Yasmin Ramadan (2012) studies the effect of the concept of *Iltizām* on the generation’s writing and emphasises the vital role literature was perceived to play in changing realties on the ground. Themes of economic inequality, the liberation of occupied Palestine, and other issues of international importance were common in this literature. She notices that these goals for literature did not exclude writing in support of specific political parties that were felt to embody these causes. She describes how from the perspective of the *Iltizām* movement, “literature is, thus, to be used both in the collective fight for socio-economic and political liberation, the ‘great national and social causes’ of the age, and in the individual quest for freedom to be attained through reading and writing” (Ramadan, 2012: 420). This facet of *Iltizām* writing is reflected in the content of the novels in this chapter, where protagonists narrate their history of participation in nationalistic political parties and movements. While the two prototypical novels below *end* on the note of the character’s initiation into such movements, the hypertexts that follow *begin* after the character has terminated their participation and the movement as a whole has ended or the political party dissolved.

Verenna Klemm (2000) shows how the didacticism of *Iltizām* as a philosophy for writing caused an internal break in the movement. In the Seventies, *Iltizām* transformed into *al-‘adab al-muqāwim* and *al-‘adab al-thawri* (literatures of resistance and revolution), which had a distinctly anti-Israeli slant. While this is a departure from broader pan-Arabist and at times pro-Soviet leanings of the previous decade, it is still not a true inward turn of the sort al-Kharrāṭ (1993) envisions in his treatise on the *New Sensibility*. The purpose of this chapter will therefore be to focus exclusively on how *Iltizām* was reconfigured and critiqued in the era of the New Sensibility by taking a close look at biographical novels whose protagonist was a committed and politically active individual. It is self-evident in all these novels that, retrospectively, the protagonist is critical of past political positions and actions. A question about the Bildungsroman of the political activist as a reactionary genre inevitably arises, and my analysis of the

novels will attempt to shed light on an answer that I will elaborate in the conclusion of this thesis.

Klemm mentions that the concept of *Iltizām* was initially met with opposition from liberal thinkers such as Ṭaha Ḥusayn. Some of their concerns echo in al-Kharrāṭ's (1993) critique of social realism of the Fifties and Sixties, where he insists that novels failed to unravel the depths of the self and social issues were too deeply synthesised into the novelistic work. He finds that all writers belonging to the new movement are looking for an ideological position that "is more liberal and deeply values human dignity" (al-Kharrāṭ, 33). Al-Kharrāṭ, therefore, finds something deeply contradictory between the reflection and critique of social reality that the proponents of *Iltizām* propagated and the liberal, humanist values that he thought engendered the *New Sensibility*. Al-Kharrāṭ's concerns are not unique to the Arabic novel; they are part of a larger debate on the genre of the novel as a whole. Lionel Trilling (1981), a self-labelled liberal critic, thought that dwelling on the suffering and the misery of the poor or rendering them as a function of their class robs them of their humanity. Conversely, literature for writers of *Iltizām* was produced for the purpose of educating and radicalising the masses and had an active role in political change.[55] Social realism in the Arab context had the role of serving the Arab cause (Seigneurie, 2008). Liberal theorists, on the other hand, insist that literature protects the self from a society that is hostile to it. This theoretical difference between different conceptions of the role and function of the genre of the novel are important to the selected authors here. Although the characters in the novels below are, or were, adherents of populist ideologies they narrate their experiences in biographical forms that, as explained in the previous chapter, imply an individualistic point of view.

In the novels from the Eighties onwards, the personal narratives of proponents of socialism and nationalism present a struggle where they ultimately fail to mould themselves into a collective narrative. As mentioned before, many of the writers associated with the Sixties' generation produced their finest writings in which their ideas became crystallised in the following decades:

[55] See Isstaif (2000).

> The young prose writers of the generation of the 1990s hardly convince when they claim that theirs is an aesthetic project radically different from that of the generation of the 1960s. They are more accurate when they present themselves as continuing the project of the earlier generation, returning to its sources, and criticizing the way in which it has either gone astray or has become a matter of routine in the hands of those who initiated it (Jacquemond, 220).

Both Kendall (2006) and Jacquemond (2008) trace incidents (successful novels, literary prizes) that canonised the work of Sixties' writers and marked the end of their status as the avant-garde. Financial markets and influence from Gulf countries were perceived to have an effect on literature in the following decades. The Sixties' generation, who were on the fringe in the late Sixties, had become part of the cultural establishment by the Eighties and Nineties and had a wide influence on younger writers.

This process of canonisation can be felt in the sub-genre studied in this chapter which, I contend, became a "vehicle for acquisition of competence" in the portrayal of the Sixties' generation ideas about the functions of the novel, particularly their critique of social realism (Duff, 2000: 2). Kendall identifies the most important debate in the Sixties as one reflecting a hostility to social realism and commitment. Although many of the Sixties' writers were leftists, she claims, they no longer considered that their political beliefs were prescriptions for literature. Some of the writers opposed to social realism concentrated on "human spontaneity to try to portray a natural person rather than a steadfast revolutionary" (Kendall, 2006: 169). One can sense from the critical atmosphere of that era that social realism's associations with radical political messages that had belonged to the creative vanguard earlier had by the late Sixties come to be seen as "automatised" (Fowler, 1982).[56] Kendall felt that this position on the part of intellectuals betrayed a certain "arrogance" that will be evident in the novels of the Eighties onwards (169).

Realism was guilty in the eyes of the post-1967 writers because of its simplistic approach to truth and the "real". Chronology was among the first stylistic traits of realism to be challenged. Using the biographical genre was ideal in focusing on the individual interpretation of reality, with regular flashbacks and the narration of events according to their importance to the

[56] See Halim (1991), Jacquemond (2008) and Kendall (2006)

character rather than to society as a whole. Opposition to social realism also manifested in the subsiding popularity of certain structures and themes such as the excessive focus on the (generally strong) family unit, on the generational novel and on crowded, urban middle class spaces. This is a point Samia Mehrez (2002) takes issue with when she reminisces about the manner in which the prototypical novel *al-Bāb al-Maftūḥ* (The Open Door) (al-Zayyāt, 1960) shows the life of the protagonist, Layla, as a reflection of a nationalistic ideology with all its implications for nation-building and independence. Mehrez demonstrates that "the battle within is the battle without" in the earlier, mid-twentieth century novels, and that *al-Bāb al-Maftūḥ* does not subvert the family icon but only modernizes it (32). By the Nineties, Mehrez notices that the concept of the nation itself is subverted in the novel and with it, predictably, the family icon. In this chapter, I will demonstrate how the more contemporary novels of the Eighties and the Nineties separated the battle grounds of the private family and the political sphere by critiquing political movements dedicated to social change. The battle without had been lost; fictional characters turned their focus inward and became deserters of earlier causes.

Mehrez deplores how the Nineties' writers portrayed characters with no collective causes that can "diffuse [the] anxiety" of alienation and selfhood (35). She explains how the omniscient narration of the Sixties was:

> Dethroned by schizophrenic, first-person narrators, whose vision is focused on their split selves. Rather than contemplate the possible unity between the personal and the collective, the writers of the Nineties are intent on representing the antagonism between them (34).

To return to Genette's (1997) terminology, Mehrez's critical metatext uses the logic of *Iltizām* (the harmonious existence of the personal and the collective) in the hypotext, *al-Bāb al-Maftūḥ*, to comment on Nineties' novels.[57] I will use the same methodology to show how the Nineties' narratives of selfhood demonstrated that any attempt to diffuse anxiety about the self into a socialist/nationalist (as in al-Ḍaʿīf's work) or Islamist concept of community (al-Birrī) is delusory. In these novels, a cultivated dignified self is the only way to

[57] For a detailed discussion of hypertextuality, the "process by which a hypotext A is transformed into a later hypertext B", see Genette's (1997) *Palimpsests: literature in the second degree.*

subvert collectivist narratives that are radically violent and sectarian. The implied values of these novels are obvious: collective thought and action do not allow for diversity, they subvert individuality and condemn uniqueness. Rather than schizophrenic selves desiring unity with a collective entity, many of these characters desire to redeem an authentic self from what is now understood as artificial, foreign and oddly alienating ideology (despite claims to collectivism) to become wholesome, developed humans in the tradition of the classical Bildungsroman (see Chapter One).

I therefore strongly disagree with the notion that "rather than announce the birth of the individual, these works race ahead to announce his/her death" (Mehrez, 2002: 35). In works presented below where there is a metaphorical death (usually by complete withdrawal from life) or a literal one the implied author points to the failure of this specific character as an individual to develop and adapt to the world. It seems not to be the pressures of the *post-infitāḥ* society that are weighing these characters down, as Mehrez and Hafez (2001) suggest, but their inability to comprehend reality and to appreciate their private family, love lives, friendships and religious communities. This is largely accomplished by the very choice of the bildungsroman /confessional /autobiographical genres that demand as a formal necessity the development of character despite socio-political constraints. The mode of individual maturity remains vital to the biographical genre from the early prototypes to the latest novel in the study, and its transformations are central to the message of each novel. I will elaborate on how in works where there is an "ungrammatical" lack of significant development of the main character the reader is alerted to the author's ambivalence to, or rejection of, the character's values (Riffaterre, 1981). By tracing the authors' utterances about this "stable speech genre" of the biographical form, I register the different ways of speaking about the ideologies of the previous generation (Bakhtin, 1986).

Most significantly, the destruction of the family unit is not, as Mehrez contends, due to the spread of capitalism or the death of the grand narratives of socialism or nationalism. I will argue in this chapter that, especially in the case of male protagonists, *it is precisely their (previous) devotion to those collective narratives that cost them their families and loved ones in the first place.* It is no coincidence that the source of melancholia for these older, single, childless and

mostly friendless protagonists seems to be years of adherence to defeated movements or what they now perceive to be false ideologies. Rather than the symbolic death of the individual that Mehrez finds in the contemporary novel I argue that al-Birrī's (2001) novel shows a rebirth, and al-Ḍaᶜīf's (1995) novel offers a resurrected individual rising from the ruins of civil war. Mehrez and Hafez highlight the evident disillusionment with the validity of all grand narratives in the Nineties. I will argue below that it is the individual that evolved into a new grand narrative.

In my analysis of this subgenre I present the autobiographical novel of a young Islamist political activist, which is an apparent change in the character type of the radical leftist activist. However, most of the other aspects of plot and character traits are held in common with the other political activists. There are several reasons for this. Klemm (2000) traces the transformations from *Iltizām* to *al-'adab al-'Islāmi* (Islamist literature). Jacquemond (2008) also discusses Islamist literature and its similarities to committed and nationalist literature; largely the result of Islamist writers being influenced by their secularist predecessors in writing fiction.[58] Although I will not be studying any instances of Islamist literature in this chapter, I will attempt to show how the mainstreaming of Islamist thought from the Seventies until today is reflected in the reaction to it by the secular writers of biographical novels. The ease with which pan-Arabism and socialism developed into pan-Islamism as time went by is registered by many of the fictional activists in this chapter. Musawi (2009) brilliantly recognises a "complicity" against religion between readers and writers of literary products in the pre-1967 period, explaining this as one of the "bourgeois practices and aspirations in a life that is divested of actual faith" (22). In the post-1967 period, I will show that writers and characters convey a consciousness of what Musawi calls "bad faith" on part of the old intellectual elite toward the masses, and they attempt to shock the implied reader who approaches the text with the expectations that it will continue in this tradition. This is accomplished not by embracing faith to reunite with the masses, but by a paradoxically agonizing realisation of one's ineffectuality as an instrument of

[58] See pages 101-4.

social change, as opposed to one's agency regarding the path of one's own life.

Ken Seigneurie (2008) recognises this trend in Lebanon, where wars that "hitched local animosities to the East-West ideological struggle" turned from secular-ideological struggles into a sectarian feud (50). He demonstrates how novels in Lebanon consequently challenged sectarianism by abandoning unexamined self-other boundaries and promoting what he calls a "new humanism" as an affirmation of human dignity and autonomy. The Lebanese novels I study in this chapter avoid delving into the complicated politics of the civil war but one finds that the similarities between the writers (who belong to different sects) are unavoidable. Zahra, the Shiite, faces the violence of being forced to abort a child conceived out of wedlock during the war while witnessing the painful circumcision of scores of Christian boys who want to avoid bearing a marker of religious identity. Rashīd's progressive Communist party gives him a fake Muslim identity. These fleeting episodes tie into Ken Seigneurie's (2008) idea of how the imagery of *al-'aṭlāl* (the ruins) emerges in Lebanon to attest to the importance of humanistic values in times of war.

> In wartime Lebanon, the rapid shift from a secular-ideological war to an atavistic feud between Christians and Muslims *dampened the sense of commitment* in those who had imagined that the cause of martyrdom should, ideally, be for the same cause from one day to the next. In literature, social chaos punctured the myth of progress and along with it realist literature predicated on a knowable world. *After a half century of serving the Arab cause, realism in the Arabic novel became an overnight anachronism*, and from its grip emerged the Lebanese war novel (my italics, Seigneurie, 2008: 49-50).

I will show how novels set in more stable countries (at the time of writing) such as Algeria and Egypt also featured the imagery of ruins through the eyes of ex-radicals. These heroes feel a deep sense of despair because they perceive that people's main ambitions in life have become consumerist: acquiring a refrigerator, television or renovating a house. These are a far cry from the grand narrative of national progress and independence to which they devoted their youth.

Reactionary sentiments are often equated with a belief in the authority of the state and reluctance to severely criticise it. The analysis of the two prototypical novels written in the Sixties and Seventies will be followed by a comparison of their main characters with those in later novels. I will present political hypertexts

that attempt to blow the whistle on the hegemonic discourse concealed by the grand narrative of nation-building, especially in the novels from Lebanon and Egypt (Islamism has a more harmonious presence in *Dhākirat al-Jasad,* 1988). Members of the Maronite Rashīd's secular Socialist movement in *ʿAzīzī al-Sayyid Kawābātā* (Dear Mr Kawabata, al-Ḍaʿīf, 1995) are converting to Islam, Zahra in *Ḥikāyat Zahra* (The Story of Zahra, al-Shaykh, 1980) cannot being persuaded by her brother's defence of Shiites. Khālid (*al-Dunya ʻAjmal Min al-Janna,* Life is Better than Paradise, 2001) has to discriminate not only against Christians and Jews but other non-*Jamāʿa* Muslims as well. In *Zahr al-Laymūn* (Lemon Flowers, al-Dīb, 1980) Munā al-Māṣrī symbolically struggles as a Copt somewhere in al-Misīrī's self-engrossed narrative. Under such social conditions, the implied authors' emphasis on the importance of the rule of law and civil rights is something that cannot be dismissed as old-fashioned, reactionary or conservative. It is a purposeful act on the part of the fictional activists, and perhaps the writers who created them, to present a recipe for survival in a society where the sectarian divisions and exclusionary practices that are the norm (but swept under the rug in the name of national struggles) were threatening the well-being of individual citizens. This is not to say there was a conscious effort to propagate a new political reality in society as with *Iltizām*, for it was a "humanism with aesthetic and moral implications but no political program", at most it concerned itself with promoting "an ideal of civic virtue" (Seigneurie, 2008, 54, 60). Seigneurie claims that, in such conditions, writing against authority would be absurd; perhaps he has identified why so many of the later novels in this study no longer direct their criticisms to the state when society as whole is equally threatening to them.

In order to elaborate on these points I will present the following novels in this chapter and the next: Laṭīfa al-Zayyāt's *al-Bāb al-Māftūh* (1960) will serve as an example of the committed, social realist writings of the Fifties and Sixties. Munīf's *Sharq al-Mutawassiṭ* (East of the Mediterranean, 1975) will show the prototypical shift to criticism of Arab states and descriptions of imprisonment and torture of activists, which is characteristic of the Seventies. Lebanese Ḥanān al-Shaykh *Ḥikāyat Zahra* (1980), Egyptian ʿAlā' al-Dīb's *Zahr al-Laymūn* (1980), Jordanian Mu'nis al-Razzāz's *'Iʿtirāfāt Kātim Ṣawt* (Confessions of a Silencer) (1986), Algerian Aḥlām Mostaghenami's *Dhākirat al-Jasad* (1988) will

serve as examples of the Eighties novel of political biography. Lebanese Rashīd al-Ḍaᶜīf (1995) *ᶜAzīzī al-Sayyid Kawābātā* and Egyptian Khālid al-Birrī (2001) *al-Dunya ‘Ajmal Min al-Janna* (Life is Better than Paradise) and Raḍwā ᶜĀshūr’s (1999) ‘*Aṭyāf* (Scepters) reflect what I consider an additional development to the genre that began in the Nineties.[59]

[59] These dates correspond to each novel’s first publication. Page numbers cited in this chapter may be from editions published later and can be found in bibliography.

II. The prototypes*: al-Bāb al-Maftūḥ* and *Sharq al-Mutawassiṭ*

David Duff (2000) explains that the "best insights in the area of modern genre theory have arisen out of research in history of genre consciousness" (2). My presentation of these two prototypes, especially the former which is a canonical text that was adapted into a famous movie, will describe the beginnings of the budding consciousness of the narrative of the life of a political activist. As elaborated in the previous chapter, my approach to genre analyses it as an evolutionary process in which central themes and traits are imitated, transformed through maximisation and minimisation techniques, and ultimately parodied (Fowler, 2000). The presentation of these prototypes outlines the basic structures and ideas used by the hypertexts in the following decades (consciously or otherwise) to adapt and challenge the genre conventions.

Al-Bāb al-Maftūḥ is a highly optimistic female Bildungsroman that serves as a typical example of commitment literature. In scholarly analyses of postcolonial and feminist Bildungsromans, there is a tendency to see themes of frustrated paths of self-development and complex characters agonizing over their inability to reach classical Bildung (postcolonial and feminist Bildungsroman as a parody of the classical Western male Bildungsroman).[60] However, *al-Bāb al-Maftūḥ* has a straight forward Bildung plot with a happy ending and its main characters are mostly uncomplicated. The novel traces the journey of Layla from childhood to independent adulthood, parallel to Egypt's path to independence. The narrative point of view constantly zooms in from events in the public sphere to Layla's middle class family home, grounding Layla's life and destiny in the nation's. Furthermore, despite the voices of Ḥusayn (Layla's romantic interest) and Sanā' (her idealistic friend) constantly repeating that Layla and the nation are in charge of their own destiny, the implied author presents a novel of inevitable progress. Ḥusayn knows that in the end Layla will find her way to him and that the nation will find its way to freedom. Layla's parents, fiancé and others who have different points of view are portrayed as highly unsympathetic characters. Despite the many obstacles that arise throughout the novel, the reader has no doubt that Layla will eventually break out of her fear of her traditional family and that the nation will overcome its fear

[60] See Castle (2006) and Abel, Hirsch and Langland (1983).

of British colonial rule. In her childhood, Layla says: “when I grow up I will beat up the English, I will beat them with weapons” (13). After much self-doubt and fear over a few years, she kills countless members of her “enemy” in an armed conflict in Port Said.

Layla’s interiority is very limited in comparison to the novels presented below; her thoughts reflect a budding feminist and nationalist discourse rather than a personal, confessional and self-analytical narrative. Many sections in the novel are framed within a collective voice or public sentiment, hence presenting the *Iltizām* ethos of parallel personal and collective progress. The first page presents voices of people on the street talking excitedly about a demonstration against British colonial rule, and other passages in the book describe street conversations on the July Revolution and the Suez Crisis. These are literally the speech genres from which this writer derives her utterance. National victories and defeats are then tied in to intimate events in Layla’s life. This narrative technique, along with the uniformly authoritarian flat characters of the father and fiancé affirm that the restrictions on Layla’s freedom are imposed from without.

Several features of this novel set it apart from the post-commitment novels I present below. Firstly, there is an uncomplicated exaltation of the idea of heroism and martyrdom. Layla finds true happiness when she is no longer afraid to die because:

> She is a drop in the sea. The sea has its waves with or without her. If she dies she is one of the thousands that have died, and if she lives she is one of those that have violated their right to life (334).

All characters that are reluctant to join the resistance are portrayed as cowardly and hypocritical. Admirable characters like Mahmūd and Ḥusayn uniformly show enthusiasm for the resistance and an unwavering belief in the people of Egypt. The personal liberation of Layla is tied intimately to the liberation of all women, which depends subsequently on the liberation of the nation from old and outdated traditions that prevent it from offering a substantive resistance to the British. Traditions are dismissed wholly in this novel, while in Mustaghānimī’s (1988) more recent feminist novel below, traditions are reappropriated consciously to perform an acquired national identity. Also in *Dhākirat al-Jasad*, the implied author presents Khālid’s

insistence on constructing his beloved as an image of the nation as a delusional and oppressive patriarchal practice; whereas Ḥusayn's similar idea of Layla is poetic and beautiful.

> My yearning for the nation does not leave me any choice but to write to you. You have become a symbol for all I love in my nation and when I think of Egypt, I think of you and when I long for Egypt, I long for you (al-Zayyāt, 1960: 209).

Khālid of *Dhākirat al-Jasad* is depicted as a man who wants to possess Aḥlām, while Ḥusayn in *al-Bāb al-Maftūḥ* wants to set Layla free.

This novel also differs from those in the Eighties onward in its portrayal of the reasons for joining the resistance. Later novels show characters with personal, mostly selfish reasons for joining political movements. Conversely, Layla is swept out of her school gates in wave of bodies and is unable to get out in her first demonstration. At the end of the novel, her return from Port Said is postponed when war erupts and blocks all the paths out of the city, compelling her to stay and resist. There are no personal reasons for her actions, she is *destined* to perform them. Being rebellious and insisting on freedom from authority in this novel is always portrayed as the right thing, while being rational and level-headed is always self-defeating. But despite this rebelliousness, the implied author does not grant Layla any autonomy. Freedom in this context is freedom from suffocating traditions which must eventually whither, but it is not a freedom to choose because Layla and the nation's destiny are preordained.

The parents' advice in this novel is evidence of their ignorance and short-sightedness, a feature which stands in stark contrast to later novels. Joining the armed resistance in *al-Bāb al-Maftūḥ* is actually "growing up," as Mahmūd tells Layla (al-Zayyāt, 101). While in later novels political activism is seen as self-indulgent youthful rebellion, in this novel it is the only responsible action. In the prototype I use from the Seventies, *Sharq al-Mutawassiṭ*, Rajab's mother encourages her son to bravely withstand the torture and interrogation in prison: "I ask you not to harm anyone, endure my boy" she tells him, and "be warned Rajab, imprisonment ends but humiliation does not. Do not say anything about your friends...do you hear me?" (Munīf , 1975, 184). Rajab's mother's words have ingrained in his mind that resistance and action amount to manliness and she has given his politics her seal of approval. The mother represents Munīf's

implied values as an author: she is the moral authority to be respected, whereas parents represented in instances of *Iltizām's* early novels are reactionary caricatures, as in *al-Bāb al-Maftūḥ*. Rajab is ashamed he is disappointing his mother, an emotion which he shares with the protagonists of the hypertexts below. But starting the Eighties this guilt is for the exact opposite reason. Rajab feels ashamed that he did not take heed of his mother's words and betrayed his political cause, while Rashīd (*ʿAzīzī al-Sayyid Kawābātā*) feels guilty because his involvement in political resistance meant denying his roots and estranging his politically conservative family.

To stay outside the resistance in commitment novels is to be "isolated in your ego as it licks its wounds", a plight from which the only cure is to dissolve the self into the collective and exit unto the vast, open public space. Ḥusayn sums the sentiment up in his letters to Layla:

> You have lived miserably in the confines of your ego, but in your depths you believe in liberation, in surrendering to the masses with love….So set yourself free, my love, link your existence with that of others, with millions of others and with our kind land and our kind people. You will find a love greater than you and me, a great beautiful love that no one can steal from you…the love of the nation (al-Zayyāt, 1960: 210-211).

Sharq al-Mutawassiṭ as a later novel shows a higher consciousness of genre than the simple *al-Bāb al-Maftūḥ*. It combines several biographical subgenres: it is at times interior monologue, epistolary novel, diary, testimonial and most strikingly confessional. It includes a self-reflexive debate about the meaning of confession and its purpose, a debate that arises out of confession being both a sign of defeat (when one confesses to an enemy or to a person in a position of power) and a sign of strength (when one confesses to raise awareness about oppression and torture). As Klemm (2000) points out in reference to the Seventies novel, the anger is against state oppression rather than Western colonialism. However, instead of setting it in a particular Arab country or time, it is an attack on all the governments of the Middle East. At first-hand, Arab nationalism seems completely reversed. Instead, we see an intense feeling of shame and hatred of the self and the nation because of its failures and defeats. The novel's protagonist Rajab expresses his hate for the Eastern coast of the Mediterranean, and sees it as backward and lacking in culture. He escapes to Europe after years of imprisonment and can only envision the Middle East as a

dark terrain inhabited by lynchers and victims. Again, state officials and bureaucrats are caricatured in a manner similar to the British in *al-Bāb al-Maftūḥ*. Significantly, Europe is described positively as the land of political freedom and humanitarian justice, but the implied author portrays Rajab's quest for rescue and asylum in Europe in a satirical tone. The answer to the suffering of Rajab and other Middle Eastern victims is not with Europeans, no matter how benevolent and just they appear to be, but rather in the unity of the Arab people and their resistance. This shift in the post-1967 relationship with the West is explored more fully in Chapters Five and Six of this thesis.

Prolonged and gruesome descriptions of torture in prison are maximised in this instance of the genre to emphasise individual helplessness in the face of extreme oppression. This sets it apart from the later novels, where torture is implied or psychological. Physical torture in this novel succeeds in eradicating any chance of real resistance. Here is one example of many in the novel:

> They put me in a big bag...with two cats. Can humans turn into the enemies of animals? What did the cats want from me? My hands were tied. I was on my face at first, and every time they hit the cats, the cats would claw at me. I tried to turn on my side, but a heavy foot pushed me down. Claws scratching my face, sinking into every part of my body. When they untied the bag, I wanted to see the cats, I wanted to memorize how my new enemies looked. The cats ran, terrified, as if they had been released from hell. My face was bloody and my left eye was bleeding (Munīf, 1975: 130).

These descriptions reinforce the message of the novel that it is impossible for an individual to withstand and resist this kind of extreme tyranny. Rajab finds himself justifying his ultimate betrayal of his friends and his cause to his dead mother on biological grounds: "it is my body that betrayed me, mother" (64). He contracts a disease in his heart and his bones that made it even more difficult to endure prison and torture. His body's defeat is portrayed as inevitable. Even strong athletic men like Hādī, the movement's leader, die from torture. Such material inevitability makes willpower nothing but a myth: "it was only my willpower that was receiving the blows" (185). Therefore, his sister 'Anīsa's questions about how much torture he endured before he surrendered deepen his despair. At what degree of torture is it excusable to betray what you stand for and your loved ones? The descriptions of torture in this novel make this a moot question: at some point, every man must fail.

Sharq al-Mutawassiṭ initially reads like the interior monologue of a traitor. But the implied author seems to be telling us that it is not Rajab's ideas that made him a traitor but the extent of the torture that he was subjected to. Rajab did not really make a decision; like Layla in *al-Bāb al-Maftūḥ* he was devoid of agency. The optimistic pre-1967 novel presents a story of inevitable victory, the latter one inevitable failure. Both, however, present individuals devoid of subjectivity. They are symbols of the nation and possess no autonomy.

Rajab feels that writing about his experience would help him and others, but he knows his fellow prisoners would forbid him for writing about them because he betrayed them. Those that did not suffer until the end have no right to write.

> Rajab Ismāʿīl has fallen. These are the only words fit for my ending. It is useless to say I stayed for five years, with their nights and days, behind prison walls. That I went to seven prisons before I got weak and confessed. A man is judged by his ending. His resistance, his strength, all these glorious words....collapse into a moment of a miserable end (Munīf, 1975: 182).

Rajab's treacherous confession means he is even deprived of the right to boast about the heroism of enduring torture like other prisoners. From a purely individualistic perspective, it was all for nothing.

A very pronounced Marxist narrative in the novel links it to the *Iltizām* movement. In this narrative, radicalisation of ordinary people is inevitable, and unified action is essential because individuals can never succeed in overcoming oppression on their own. In unity there is comfort; Rajab is profoundly happy after a long period of solitary confinement to stand in smelly, claustrophobic and cramped quarters with thirteen other men. Unified action of the masses is constantly mentioned by both Rajab and others: "out of my hatred and the hatred of the millions we will destroy your prisons...with our hands", and "for a number of people to speak in one voice" (207, 210). Furthermore, this unified action is inevitable because every character in the story is compelled to take action against the state, even the most apolitical ones. Rajab's mother is forced to defend her son and withstand humiliation from prison guards. Ḥāmid, Rajab's brother-in-law, finds himself harassed and accused of crimes he had nothing to do with and spontaneously starts ranting about the government using words his wife had never heard him saying. The interesting thing about Ḥāmid's radicalisation is that it withdraws responsibility

from Rajab entirely. In later novels, the activists are portrayed as responsible for the trouble their families are dragged into because of their foolishness and vanity. But Ḥāmid's words are clear: "The issue now has become my own...even if this weren't about Rajab, they would have invented a thousand indictments against me" (170). Ḥāmid has become an outlaw by coincidence.

While the torture Rajab endures poses a question about the point of being in prison, the harassment him and his family endure after his release poses an equally legitimate question about the point of being outside it. No one is able to live a peaceful life, and hence staying away from politics becomes impossible. It is 'Anīsa's radicalisation that is the most surprising in the novel. She was the one that was most opposed to Rajab's activity and was urging him to confess so they could all lead a normal life. But Rajab's illness is symbolic of their dilemma: in order to cure himself from the unnamed illness, he must stop living. He must conform to a strict diet, avoid sex, sleep regularly, and avoid any excessive emotion. He is dead either way. By the end of the novel, he is literally dead. Rajab's death and final wish that 'Anīsa burn his writings demonstrate the frailty of the human condition and the impossibility of individual victory. His writings survive because 'Anīsa picks up where he left off; her narrative voice merges with his. She realises that her passivity was a sin and publishes the diary:

> So that everyone can read it, with all its mistakes and screams. Rajab does not want this, but as I told you...I was a sinner, and now I want to follow Rajab's path: *I will push things to their end*....in the hope that after that, something will take place (my italics, Munīf, 1975: 220).

These final words make this a positive ending for a novel with a very melancholic and fatalistic tone. Rajab may have been defeated as an individual, but his narrative will merge with that of many others and that collective narrative will eventually amount to effective resistance to the state.

This novel shares with the previous era of the Fifties and Sixties its purpose as a political document. The preface of Geneva Convention on Human Rights serves as appropriate paratext linking it to the real-world problem of torture. Like commitment writers, Rajab believes that writing is political action, but it is not enough of an action by itself. He doesn't want to write "words to illicit emotional responses, but to incite action...a word is not a weapon, but people's

conscience, their minds, their obligations, are real weapons" (175). The reader never forgets that for Rajab writing is a means to an end. It is the last resort of a resisting individual. Munīf as an implied author produces a frame story that imitates this mission, so that Rajab's text within the text mirrors Munīf's own.

Ken Seignueurie (2011) explains that there were two divergent aesthetic trends in response to the desolation of the civil war in Lebanon. The first one, which he names "mythical utopian narratives", emphasises the importance of individual sacrifices to redeem the collective (8). The more the blood let towards a cause, the more justified the cause is portrayed to be. These mythical narratives present an atrocious past and stress the need for preventive action to avoid its repetition and finally predict a utopian future. Seignueurie describes this as a "tight, compelling narrative that leaves nothing to chance or ambiguity" (10). It is this feature, this inevitability of some happy ending, that *al-Bāb al-Maftūḥ* and *Sharq al-Mutawassiṭ* as prototypes exemplify as instances of commitment literature. Seignueurie claims that the opposite trend, "elegiac pasts", attempt to escape the teleology of this narrative. It is my contention that the novels I present below as instances of the evolving genre do the same. Once the idea of inevitable paths of national and personal progress is challenged, the individual emerges as more autonomous and more responsible for his or her choices.

Despite these features of *Sharq al-Mutawassiṭ* that link it to the earlier commitment writings, others make it a precursor to the individualistic biographical narratives that follow. The idea of home or the homeland is beginning to be devalued: even if the unity of the Arab world remains intact as the title of the novel demonstrates, it is a hated and dark place. The political leader's motivational speeches to his followers, though still sincere (unlike their evident hypocrisy as in the hypertexts below), sound hollow after long descriptions of torture and pain. The novel also has an important motif of castration and emasculation. Before imprisonment, Rajab believed that to fear for his life and to fear prison was a form of castration, but in prison he realises that it is his lack of a fulfiling private life with a woman and a family that is truly emasculating. One of the prisoners says that "prison and women don't mix. Prison is destroyed when it is overcome by the idea of a woman....castrate yourselves to end your misery" (55). This idea will reappear in later novels, but

will become maximised to emphasise the futility of resistance and militancy. One important idea that arises is that of the oppressed also being guilty of short-sightedness, betrayal and treason.

The overwhelming feeling of defeat in the novel *Sharq al-Mutawassiṭ* makes it an important historical instance of how the perceived political defeat of 1967 affected a genre of the biographical novel, making it more introverted than it was before. The confessional tone of this novel is one that harkens back to the religious origins of the genre in the Western literary heritage: that of confession for the sake of repentance for one's sins. Rajab begs his mother for forgiveness for his mistake: "can you accept a man that fell and that is trying, even after he fell, to become cleansed" (211). This idea of confession of failures and defeats for repentance will resonate in later novels, although the source and meaning of defeat will greatly differ. Finally, Munīf introduces the artistic dilemma between writing a political document testifying to the suffering of victims of oppression and writing a novel. Unfortunately for Munīf, this novel ends up reading more like the former than the latter.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, I will use intertextuality as a restrictive interpretive model that links formal and thematic features of these prototypes to future texts (Riffaterre, 1994). The hypertextual biographical novels presenting narratives of political activists invite comparison with canonical texts, such *al-Bāb al-Maftūḥ* and *Sharq al-Mutawassiṭ*. Notably, the protagonist (and sometimes other important characters in the novel) become more complicated, their interiority occupying much more narrative space: the confessional aspects of the subgenre is emphasised through the intricacies of the unique psychology of the character and their traits and lives are no longer (directly or simplistically) used to refer to socio-historical events. Characters become more prone to melancholy and individual failure, with no recourse to collective action like the prototypical novels.

III. The political activist as fictional character type

Layla of *al-Bāb al-Maftūḥ* and Rajab of *Sharq al-Mutawassiṭ* are flat character types. Although they struggle in their lives of activism, this struggle is against external familial and socio-political forces and is not an internal psychological one. Layla's traditional, patriarchal family and community presents obstacles to her destined involvement in the nationalist movement. However, the obstacles do not cause significant internal conflicts: she does not analyse or obsess over them intellectually, she does not seem to consciously resist them on a daily basis. Layla becomes aware of the meaningless of traditions and the importance of the national struggle and at that moment of maturity, obstacles easily vanish. The state oppresses and tortures Rajab until he surrenders all hope of resisting. But although Rajab as a tortured soul is a more profound character than Layla and has more characteristics of a confessional hero, his character and his internal conflicts all boil down to the singular event of his betrayal. His relationships to other characters in the novel are uncomplicated (simple respect for the movement leader Hādī, simple love for his sister and mother, etc).

As with other characters in novels having characteristics of *al-'adab al-multazim*, their simplicity aims to convey a certain clear message to the reader. Both novels present the outlook that social change is possible and that resistance to power by ordinary people is a noble goal and a solution to social problems. The former presents this change as easy, requiring only awareness and a little courage. The latter, bearing the burden of the 1967 defeat, presents it as a long, tortuous process that is bound to be filled with many failures and sacrifices. In both, however, the simplicity of the message about the necessity of a people's movement is evident in the lack of development of character, as each character's life is heading to a specified goal.

The more recent novels in my study, less interested in giving a formulaic description of the problems and solutions of their societies to the reader, offer characters that are much more complex. Continuing the tradition of the confessional, the characters are always intellectuals, writers or artists. But unlike the prototypes, intellectual and artistic activities play a more important role in their lives and in the narrative, even when the details of such activity remain unclear. For example, in *ʿAzīzī al-Sayyid Kawābātā* (1995), Rashīd's

intellectual questions and readings seem to manifest themselves concretely in the social world. He describes Brecht's *Galileo* as one of "life's most beautiful gifts" to him, and consequently he sees life unravelling to affirm his interpretation of this work (al-Ḍaᶜīf, 1995, 47). .In a brilliant passage in which Rashīd's mother confronts him about his atheistic views, Rashīd's overriding feeling seems to be joy because his mother's words about the meaningless of life without God realistically enact the concerns of Sagredo in *Galileo*. His intellectual ideas inform his experience of reality.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the intellectual/artist is a recurring character type in the genre of confessional novel in general. It is a character type that invites the excessive interiority and self-analysis associated with the confessional novel. Al-Misīrī in *Zahr al-Laymūn* (1980) is a poet, Khālid in *Dhākirat al-Jasad* (1988) is a painter, Rashīd in *ᶜAzīzī al-Sayyid Kawābātā* and the doctor in *'Iᶜtirāfāt Kātim Ṣawt* (1986) are writers, Raḍwā and Shajar in *'Aṭyāf* (1999) are professors of literature at an Egyptian University and Khālid in *al-Dunya 'Ajmal Min al-Janna* (2001) is a talented orator. These character types link this genre of the Arabic novel to other literatures, but they also seem to refer to the extra-literary world in which the novelists themselves are part of the artistic community and intelligentsia of their country.[61] Several characters are explicitly autobiographical: Aḥlām in *Dhākirat al-Jasad,* Rashīd in *ᶜAzīzī al-Sayyid Kawābātā,* Khālid in *al-Dunya 'Ajmal Min al-Janna,* Raḍwā ᶜĀshūr' in *'Aṭyāf.* Perhaps owing to their closeness to the fictional characters and their willingness to write overtly autobiographical novels the authors of the more recent novels succeed in making their characters more developed.

There is another justification for the simplicity of character in the earlier novels. Layla starts as a child and ends as a young woman. Moretti (1987) explains that in the Bildungsroman, youth is given tremendous value over maturity. He shows how in the English and German instances of the genre, youth is significant in the role that it plays in the development of the character toward maturity. Conversely, Moretti shows how maturity amounts to betrayal of the values of youth in the French Bildungsroman. One can categorise the biographical novels in this study in a similar way: the prototypes tend to give

[61] See Jacquemond (2008) and Kendall (2006) for more on the relationship between writers of fiction and the Arab intelligentsia.

more weight to youth and the principles characters endorse during it. The hypertexts present characters who are sceptical and disillusioned with the values they held during their youth.

Hypertexts in this study tend to end in old age (with al-Birrī's as an important exception). I will elaborate more on the significance of this below, but for now it suffices to say that older characters are more cynical of youthful rebellion. Narrative voices present rebellion and militancy as empty of content, as vainglory: the parroting of ideas without comprehension. In Richards and Waterbury (1996) radical Arab youth are accused of "frequently… espous[ing] militancy for militancy's sake, virtually without regard for its ideological content" (324). The narrators of the hypertexts I discuss here would agree. In al-Dīb's (1980) novel, the protagonist al-Misīrī believes that history repeats itself. Together with his young radical nephew he represents a life cycle of youthful rebellion and mature resignation that makes this novel the bleakest I present in this chapter and the next. Seeing his young nephew's passionate radicalism, al-Misīrī notices the hollowness and simplicity of his own previous words and actions when he was also "debating and opposing everything…[believing] revolution is waiting around the corner, as if change must be holistic and radical and cannot be divided into phases" (130). Al-Misīrī feels that the young are fated to be rebellious: "that is his right, his destiny," he thinks of his nephew (139). Conversely, the old are fated to think about their origins. The nephew may want to cut off links with what he calls the 'Old Left' to begin anew but the implied author seems to predict that he will repeat the failures of the old. Similarly in al-Razzāz (1986), the old guard of idealists are deserted and mocked by a society that has grown a little impatient with them.

Al-Misīrī often repeats that the words and ideas of his activist days have lost their meaning, but he simultaneously longs for these days. He yearns for the books he used to read and his ex-wife, Munā al-Māṣrī, who is firmly associated with this time of his life. It is important to note that communism and nationalism are never discussed or analysed as philosophies, and neither is the reason they were abandoned, nor is there a scrutiny of what has come in their place. Instead, he recalls the content of his ideological books in a dreamy manner, claiming they represented "the rituals of a new religion he practised in

secret…he became a slave to their words" (al-Dīb, 1980: 86-87). His passionate attachment to the ideas of communism and nationalism meant:

> The nation has an image and a meaning. It has peasants working in the fields, workers leaving the factory, mechanics working in clean alleys, students sitting neatly behind their desks. He doesn't see this picture any more, and instead he sees television sets endlessly turned on amid new distorted constructs (al-Dīb, 1980: 66).

As an aspiring poet, this image has become his *ars poetica*, making him very similar to the writers of *Iltizām.*[62] Similarly, in al-Razzāz (1986), the doctor and his son Aḥmad briefly, and maybe with studied vagueness, say that their movement aims to reconcile nationalism with its emphasis on tradition and authenticity with dialectical materialism, without further elaboration. Also in league with other disappointed nationalists is Mustaghānimī's (1988) Khālid. He realises that his idolisation of martyrdom for the sake of freedom was a very narrow-minded view of freedom:

> We chose a different, more lucrative word for death so we were driven to it without fear…Why did we forget in those days to also give freedom more than one name. Why did we limit freedom to its original meaning? (Mustaghānimī,1988: 26).

As mentioned above, it is the late novels that offer the most conscious and aggressive critiques of the old ones. Rashīd recalls the days of his radicalism with biting sarcasm and Khālid al-Birrī's autobiography goes at length to uncover the holes and the blind spots in the ideas that had captured him when he was only a few years younger. In this respect, Rashīd as a character stands in stark contrast to Mustaghānimī's Khālid. The latter realised that his idealistic generation were not able to deliver real results but blames this on the corrupt government. On the other hand, Rashīd realises that his previous ideals were *inherently* flawed as they could not be of relevance to the real world, that they were merely "trite phrases" and empty rhetoric (al-Ḍaᶜīf, 1999: 16). The brief and summarising way he recites these ideas purposefully makes them sound preposterous. He does not attempt to hide his disdain for his former self, saying that he liked to "to debate with the comrades in our cell and to study the tactics by which the forces of imperialism tried to oppose the first socialist revolution in history (I don't say these words in jest Mr Kawabata, please take my words

[62] For a more detailed discussion of the theories that underpinned *Iltizām* as a movement, see Klemm (2000).

seriously and literally)" (134). Rashīd in the present time of narration retells the details his youthful radicalism, as does Khālid in *al-Dunya 'Ajmal Min al-Janna* with much humour and satire. This is a different tone from the melancholic regret, rage and anxiety with which Munīf's Rajab, Mustaghānimī's Khālid, al-Razzāz's Yūsuf and al-Dīb's al-Misīrī present their memories. Palestinian Imīl Ḥabībī's (1974) classic also uses this dark humour; however, the joke is on the protagonist for his passiveness and his efforts to live a normal life under the Israeli occupation instead of joining the resistance. What we see here in al-Ḍaᶜīf and al-Birrī is a satirical tone that reverses that message.

The owner of the present narrative voice in autobiographical writing sometimes alternates between being close and being distant with the previous self. Khālid in *al-Dunya 'Ajmal Min al-Janna*, can easily reveal the duality in the ideology of *al-Jamāᶜa al-Islāmiyya* (The Islamic Group) and the hypocrisy of its members while showing that it took a significant period of time for the younger Khālid to comprehend and come to terms with it. Khālid, the present authorial voice, is able to show the duality of the group's ideology as he simultaneously shows the innocence of the young boy that believed it. One of the ways in which he does this is by showing how the identity of *al-Jamāᶜa* as a group could be distinguished only by discriminating against other groups. A lot of detail is given in the novel about the way the group makes its members distinguish themselves from others. To start with, ceasing all communication with Christians typically comes first, he says: "If *halal* and *haram* (permitted and prohibited) were my first lessons in faith, learning to discriminate against non-Muslims was my first lesson in commitment" (32). But the most heated debates and conflicts are with other Islamists groups. Khālid shows the effort he had to put in understanding the differences in ideologies between the Muslim Brotherhood, *'Anṣar al-Sunna, al-Takfīr wa 'l-Hijra* (these are another two fundamentalist organisations). In this very subtle section of the novel he shows how although there are basic differences between them there are blind spots in the thought of each that he must overlook if he is to accept being a member of his own group. For example, *al-Jamāᶜa* thinks that the Muslim Brotherhood "are more dangerous to Islam than the Jews" (al-Birrī, 2001, 64). References collapse under rational scrutiny and the reasons for subscription to them are revealed as personal, incidental and more importantly, self-interested. It is the

moment that he accepts the irrationality of this ideology and embraces what he perceives as the group's opportunism that plural pronoun "we" replaces the confessional 'I' for the first time in the text.

The characters of the biographical novels of political activists are often prone to such absurd, repetitive, very heated debates. Many passages portray their politics as idle talk that is conducted in bars and that ends up in petty, drunken brawls. In *'Iᶜtirāfāt Kātim Ṣawt*, memories of the era of activism are fading and fist fights between drunken older members of the party indicate that these ideals have vanished because they were lacking in substance to begin with. That explains why the activists "move in a hellish vicious circle" (al-Razzāz, 1986: 116). The narrator uses the words "belief" (qanāᶜa) and "mask" (qināᶜ) in playful puns, stressing that belief systems are often used in politics to mask other intentions (198-9). Musawi (2009) notices this emerging literary code in early post-1967 fiction where gatherings of those interested in politics involve "playing cards, arguing, shouting at each other…hardly listen[ing] to each other…there is excitement and rhetoric with no action" (114-5).

In the hypertexts, it is very striking that ex-radicals now have few grievances against the state and instead focus all their judgements on their own political movement. In fact, it is unclear why all of them had any specific problems with the state to begin with. Fatḥi Nūr, in *Zahr al-Laymūn* asks al-Misīrī:

> Am I a threat to national security? Am I a threat to Egypt…In reality I am a fan of Abdel Nasser. I see him as a chivalrous hero from Upper Egypt. Is it him that imprisoned us? Did he order the beatings and the torture? Do you understand? Please explain the neat words that our older colleagues speak, because these words are becoming more ambiguous to me (al-Dīb, 1980: 53).

When al-Misīrī is in prison, one of the prisoners even declares that "masks don't conceal fangs. This outer crust of socialism is nothing but a beautifully ornamented Arabian urn that hides within it unbridled opportunism" (al-Dīb, 1980: 25). When al-Misīrī is released from prison he accepts favours from those in powerful positions in government to get a job.

Al-Misīrī refers constantly to the hypocrisy and hollowness of the political small talk that his activist friends practice. The past has been boiled down to "long repetitive conversations at night on politics and how people have changed, where everyone knows those guilty of allegations and

treacheries, condemnations and denials, illusions and losses" (al-Dīb, 1980: 15). He starts escaping from "the café gatherings with their long, memorized discussions" (92). Al-Misīrī envies Fatḥi Nūr for his wife, conventional Firyāl, who manages to give them an abundant life despite their poverty. This is because she lives in the details of her life and does not bother herself with "empty meaningless words" (58).

These descriptions offer us characters of political activists that are often hypocritical, opportunistic and idle. Political activists are portrayed in a very negative light compared to those in the prototypes. In *Ḥikāyat Zahra* (1980), the heroine is ambivalent to the idealism of the men in the novel. She listens to her uncle's nationalistic ideas and Mālik's lectures on the equality of women and appears to see through their hypocrisy. She does not sympathise with her brother's views on the rights of Shiites during the war, nor does she find that any of the warring factions have convincing demands and ideas. Hāshim's confession includes many of the ideological and thematic aspects that characterise the other political activists in this section. He confesses that as a young man his enthusiasm verged on fanaticism and that he hadn't really engaged with or even understood his party's ideology. His narrative shows that he was not a member of this party because he wanted to belong, instead he wanted to stand out. Hāshim desires to be an individual within the group and takes drastic, dangerous measures to be seen as a heroic, independent leader. In this sense he is comparable to many of the politically active characters. Rashīd in al-Ḍaᶜīf's (1995) novel is jealous of the party's leader because only the latter is distinguished while Rashīd is invisible. Khālid, in al-Birrī's (2001) novel, goes out of his way to excel in learning the books of Islamic jurisprudence so that he would be admired. When compared with such characters, Zahra's self-engrossed lack of sustained interest in politics or the war does not seem eccentric and cannot be explained simplistically by her lack of access to the public sphere as a female. Self-interest drives the most politically engaged of characters in this subgenre.

The examples of activists' hypocrisy in the novels are countless and one can safely say that the hypocritical political activist has become a stock character type in Arabic fiction. This is a clear genre transformation from the characters in the prototypical novels and in *Iltizām* literature, where political activists were

courageous and moralistic and, on the other hand, uselessness, two-facedness and opportunism were reserved for those in power or traditional people. Al-Misīrī, the stubborn Communist, instinctively protects his own pockets when he is approached by a beggar. His wife, the hedonistic Munā al-Māṣrī who urges him to quit his job to focus on his poetry, is a woman who "never knew what it was to need money," and his progressive circle of friends find themselves partying in the houses of rich people and migrating to gulf countries to make a living (al-Dīb, 1980: 73). In al-Razzāz (1986), members of the undefined revolutionary movement "left it when times were rough and returned in its golden age" (59). Khālid in Mustaghānimī's novel (1988) looks with disdain on his countrymen's simple aspirations to acquire better and more modern housing from the comfort of his Parisian studio overlooking the Seine. In *ʿAzīzī al-Sayyid Kawābātā*, Rashīd finds himself wondering why he never once questioned why the communist party gave him and other Christians fake ids with Muslim names despite the fact that they were fighting for the rights of Palestinian Muslims. Rashīd's double's ultimate hypocrisy seems to be when he, a Christian then an atheist, converts to Islam at the end of the novel in order to fit in with the majority and to be able to marry a proper, conservative and "non-marginalized girl" (al-Ḍaʿīf, 1995: 200). In al-Birrī, the protagonist hides erotica behind his religious books. *Al-Jamāʿa* sheikhs opt to keep a gay man in the organisation because he is valuable as a member after sending him to a psychiatrist. Khālid himself feels sexually aroused by the gay man's confession because the latter had dared to do something forbidden.

However, the most striking feature of this hypocrisy is that those activists who claim to represent the interests of the masses are elitist and alienated from them. Layla in *al-Bāb al-Maftūḥ* blends easily into the independence movement, and Rajab's life story is merged into the life of others who will outlive him to continue his fight. In the latter novels, activists are incapable of belonging to a larger community. They are often much more educated and perhaps of a higher socio-economic class. They are well read in foreign literatures and philosophies that the native community does not comprehend or value. Belonging to small cliques with bohemian lifestyles, their behaviours and opinions alienate them further. In *Dhākirat al-Jasad*, Khālid endorses elitism when it is practised by the old classes such as descendants of the prophet or families of martyrs, but he

cannot stand the new elites. In the last scene of the book, the customs official at the airport cannot "read" into Khālid's amputated arm. The man does not recognise from the severed limb that he is in the company of a war hero and treats him like a smuggler. Finally, Khālid thinks that "it happens that a nation becomes illiterate" (404). He feels the nation cannot read its own history because of its illiteracy and blames his misery on the nation's shortcomings.

In *Dhākirat al-Jasad* (1988), Khālid's rejection of the wedding of the imagined nation, symbolised in the character of Aḥlām, to the military officer is an instance of this alienation. Khālid's illusions about Aḥlām show the extent of his elitism and his alienation, perhaps owing to the many years he spent in France. Whereas Nāsir, the pious Muslim, and Khālid, the secularist, see this marriage as the ultimate betrayal, Ḥasan - the regular apolitical citizen - considers it the normal way of doing things according to tradition and culture. Ḥasan refuses to judge the marriage the way they do: "I don't know what logic you want me to use to condemn it. For sure, in our way of doing things this is a normal marriage. It's not the first marriage of its kind, nor will it be the last" (Mustaghānimī, 1988: 347). The revolutionary spirit of Khālid may have been effective in liberating a colonised nation, but it could not change its people's "way of doing things". By continuing to reject the nation's ways, Khālid remains alienated from it in his suspended place (symbolised by his obsessive painting of bridges). Yet, in spite of the implied author's value judgement that Khālid is a slightly proud and elitist member of an outdated intelligentsia, she manages to make him a highly romantic and admirable hero for his staunch defence of his ideals.

Mustaghānimī's novel straddles the two poles of commitment writing and individualistic autobiography. It is a late Arabic novel, but an early Algerian one, and perhaps this influenced the decision to make the Independence War veteran a sympathetic character. The implied author seems to need to document the respect the nation has to those who liberated it in an Arabic language novel while having the benefit of hindsight as to where they went wrong. Khālid's stubborn idealism is always ambivalent, making him both righteous and naïve, moralistic and annoyingly morally superior: "I found a rare happiness in comparing myself to the triviality of others. I found in my personal defeats evidence of victories that others could not have" (Mustaghānimī, 1988:

271). The reader may judge al-Misīrī in *Zahr al-Laymūn*, the doctor and Aḥmad in *ʻIʿtirāfāt Kātim Ṣawt* and Raḍwā and Shajar in *ʻAṭyāf* in this manner: idealists with minor flaws, including their irrelevance to the nation's tangible problems. For example, Shajar the University professor is outraged when she feels that sanctity of her University is soiled by the carnivalesque and vulgar celebrations of the students. But like her double, Raḍwā ʿĀshūr' the character, she is likeable precisely because she refuses to accept the degeneration of mass culture. After all, there is an implicit expectation that the reader that chooses to pick up a novel such as *ʻAṭyāf* may feel the same distaste at gaudy celebrations on a campus. The implied reader is also one that is removed from the masses, alienated by her ability and willingness to read an experimental novel. In al-Ḍaʿīf and al-Birrī, this collusion with the reader is replaced with a harsh judgement. Both authors parody the elitism and alienation that the rhetoric of these fictional intellectuals conceals. While in Mustaghānimī, al-Dīb and al-Razzāz characters' arrogance is ultimately harmless to most people but themselves, al-Ḍaʿīf and al-Birrī show that it is dangerous and violent.

I will elaborate more on this below. For now, it is important to note how selfishness manifests itself as a major character flaw. Political activists in these novels fail to contribute to their families, create families or friendships of their own and are mostly unemployed or unsuccessful at work. They are all trapped in what they feel is a suffocating solitude, also a characteristic of the confessional genre. Al-Misīrī roams the streets of Cairo late at night alone, with no where he could go, surrounded by his immanent death as he passes by cemeteries. In al-Razzāz, Yūsuf the assassin has to hire a prostitute to listen to him talk. Khālid in Mustaghānimī and al-Misīrī become old men obsessing over failed relationships. Rashīd has alienated himself from his family by being a Communist, and lost his friends in the political party when its activities ended after the civil war. The young Islamist in al-Birrī's novel panics when he realises that the path he has chosen may mean he will never have a romantic relationship or proper career.

There seems to be a consensus in the novels that the characters were harmed by the choices they had made in their youth. There is a recurrent motif of wasted potential. Opportunities are passed due to excessive pride or false beliefs. Again this is a transformation from the prototypes. While the heroes and

heroines of the pre-1967 novels were subject to forces beyond their control, such as an authoritarian family or excessive torture, the post-1967 authors are careful to present their characters as having many choices. In *Ḥikāyat Zahra* (1980), it is not merely social taboos or constraints that paralyse her with her chronic fear because she has many opportunities to escape these constraints: Mājid, her husband, is ready to overlook her problems, but she still rejects him. She has the opportunity to help refugees during the war, but she does not. She quits her volunteer work in the hospital after only three days. She uses the freedom that the war gives her (she can now live in a house alone without her parents) to go on a search for a man, again. The technique of using external constraints to mirror the limitations of the character's psyche is one that al-Kharrāṭ (1993) traces in the New Sensibility. He demonstrates that "the real obstacles" to individual will in this type of novel "are not to be found in social traditions….[but] on the psychological level. Social traditions are only an allegorical representation of another set of rules"; namely, the rules of human desire (al-Kharrāṭ, 71). Al-Shaykh excels in highlighting Zahra's wasted potential. The long passage describing sex with sniper, Sāmī, collapses a vast amount of narrative and meaning into a moment of sexual pleasure, making this climax an epiphany of sorts. Khālid in *al-Dunya 'Ajmal Min al-Janna* also experiences such a moment of sexual liberation/intellectual epiphany. This incident has been read as proof that sexual pleasure empowers Zahra.[63] But as in most confessional novels, Zahra's narrative becomes circular. Every progress she makes is met by a set-back. She returns to obsessing over her family and she now fears Sāmī as well. Similarly, there is no reason for al-Misīrī to be walking so late at night, as he inherited a property from his father that he never furnished. The incomplete building symbolises the wasted potential of al-Misīrī's life, as does his unused passport. A friend tells him that "you took your clothes off on the shore but did not swim. You are a diver in a cup of tea. A poet with no madness" (al-Dīb, 1980: 4). Khālid in Mustaghānimī's novel refuses to properly commit to either woman in the novel. Rashīd and al-Misīrī do not take heed of the many warnings their family give them about their personal and

[63] See especially Accad (1990).

political choices. In short, the fictional activist in these novels is one with plenty of choice.

And it is because they are very aware that they had these choices that the overriding narrative tone of these texts is remorseful. Moretti's (1987) two types of Bildungsroman plot are classified according to whether freedom or happiness are more important. It can be said that the fictional political activists in the hypertexts all chose freedom, only to crave happiness. This section aimed to highlight some of the character traits that the political activists in the biographical genre share, and how they have transformed from prototypical characters. I will now proceed to elaborate on how these character traits indicate a more individualistic ideology, and how this evolution signifies a move away from previous ideologies of Arab nationalism and socialism.

Chapter Four: Abstract Individualism in the Narratives of Fictional Political Activists

I. The authentic self and its creative representation

With the microscopic focus on the individual that is a stylistic feature of the biographical novel, events in the narrative are presented as the outcome of the character's decisions and personality, stressing individualism's tenets of autonomy and spontaneous desire. In this chapter, the ideological narratives of Arab nationalism and socialism are challenged in various forms through the presentation of the distorted life of the very activists that endorsed them. This distortion is maximised through greater focus on the activists' intimate relationships and their connections to other members of political movements, often presented through the literary vehicle of the double. Finally, these strained personal and professional relationships entail a period of exile, failure, compromise in the novel, which may or may not end in the notion of Bildung. The survey of these features of the novels by no means exhausts all the intertextual links between them, nor does it exclude the limitless links each has with other texts. It does, however, point to an individualist sentiment emerging in the subgenre's hypertexts.

In the first chapter of this study I discussed some of the principle concepts of individualism. Primarily, individualism emphasises people's ability to affect their lives through conscious decisions. Human beings are viewed as having given, authentic traits that they are free to embrace and develop, and it is the public and state's responsibility to give them the privacy to do so and not to interfere with the process. The inner life of the individual is of great value. I also discussed how these individualistic values related to biographical genres that emphasise self-cultivation. In this chapter, I will proceed to show how the biographical novels of political activists exemplify these principles.

In the previous chapter I discussed how choice was absent to protagonists in prototypical novels. We meet Rajab when he is already in prison in Munīf's novel, and the details of how he became involved in political resistance are not revealed. But the fate of Rajab's mother, Ḥāmid and ʻAnīsa who found themselves compelled to join the resistance to state oppression is comparable

to the wave that swept Layla in *al-Bāb al-Maftūḥ* out of the school gates in her first demonstration against the British Occupation. It may be concluded that Rajab joined his movement in the same manner; inevitable forces gather people toward a unified goal.

Conversely, the hypertextual novels I have selected for this study narrate the choice evident in the first instance of joining new political parties or other forms of political action. Even when the protagonists are too young to be entirely conscious of their actions they are portrayed to be acting in accordance with their given traits that are unique to them only, rather than participating in a massive collective action. This is built up to through a chain of events that reveal these given traits that led the character to choose these specific actions. Before providing examples, I would like to mention two exceptions. Al-Razzāz's novel does not explain the positive political activity of the doctor and Aḥmad. They are presented as revolutionaries and dissidents without an explanation how they got there. However, the unsympathetic character with harmful political activity, Yūsuf, narrates some of the circumstances that made him an assassin although the implied author does not allow the reader to reach the conclusion that this assassin was shaped by these circumstances. Rather, his choice of being an assassin is the result of his negative character traits and his attempts to justify his choices through outside circumstances make him all the less sympathetic.

Interestingly, Raḍwā ᶜĀshūr''s (1999) autobiographical novel does not elaborate too much on the reason for her joining the demonstrations either. On the whole, ᶜĀshūr''s novel allies itself with the prototypical novels here in that her character is devoid of any outstanding traits and much of the novel is purposefully written to feel like it is a reproduction and rewriting of commitment writing. She has a handsome Communist teacher who is arrested and inspires her to ask questions about communism. ᶜĀshūr' explicitly categorises herself as the literary child of Laṭīfa al-Zayyāt and narrates her personal story as a literal embodiment of *al-Bāb al-Maftūḥ* (1960):

> A few months after I graduated from University I read the novel *al-Bāb al-Maftūḥ* where the opening scene narrated the events of 21st February 1946 [she directly quotes first few lines of al-Zayyāt's novel] I read about the events of 1946 and went out to demonstrate in 1972 (ᶜĀshūr', 1999: 39).

Demonstration is a mechanical reaction to reading about the historical student marches against the British Occupation and the Egyptian government 26 years earlier. Hegemonic structures are always in place in these narratives, and the tools to resist them are known and predictable. In that sense, ᶜĀshūr''s novel maintains many of the characteristics of the pre-1967 commitment novel although it was written in the late Nineties because the writer strongly identifies with a previous generation. She takes special pride in associating personally with famous revolutionary writers. But unlike its hypotext *al-Bāb al-Maftūḥ,* in which Layla's story seamlessly blended into the national movement, *'Aṭyāf* 's merging of the political and the personal is awkward. The autobiographical narrator admits she is conscious of this disparity between her personal life and political events. She is aware that her attempts to weave her personal story or that of her double, Shajar, results in a patchwork of a narrative in comparison with the texts and writers she references and alludes to:

> I don't know why my memories of my travels are linked to what happened [she is referring to the civil war] in Beirut…I know it's bitterly ironic because my keeping track of the events or the lack of it are of no consequence, the end result would be the same… (ᶜĀshūr', 1999: 143).

Aside for these two exceptions, the other novels of this chapter give an elaborate description of the beginnings of political activity. Al-Misīrī's confession constantly takes him back to his symbolic marriage to a woman who shared his ideology, Munā al-Māṣrī (al-Dīb, 1980). His description of the carefree nature of their relationship before the marriage and their subsequent disillusionment echoes the more literal descriptions of the commencement of political activity and its ending in the other novels. Zahra begins her interest in the events of the war in the second half of the novel after a long, self-engrossed confession (al-Shaykh, 1980). When the war starts, Zahra is at a point in her life when she feels liberated from her obsessive fear about her non-virginity and her divorce has been finalised. She can now think about political events, a fact that is reversed when her personal circumstances change and she has an unwanted pregnancy. Khālid in Mustaghānimī's (1988) novel narrates how becoming an orphan attracted him to Aḥlām's father. Al-Ḍaᶜīf's (1995) autobiographical novel narrates in detail the events leading Rashīd to his first demonstration. It was a combination of rebellion against a cruel father and a boyish desire to skip

school and explore Beirut's brothels that led him to secretly participate in it. In al-Birrī (2001), a small boy who was bullied by others shows that he was attracted to *al-Jama'a* because of an imitated desire to be like its strong and fearless bearded members. He has a personal reason for wanting to surround himself with a supportive community he finds in other activists. The narrative voice describing this initiation into activism tends to have a cynical tone about the motivations for it, always portraying them as the result of insecurity or vanity. In *Ḥikāyat Zahra*, her sudden exaggerated interest in the external events of the war is preceded by long descriptions of her psychiatric hospitalization. Although her panic at the atrocities of the war is genuine, her mental health is always in question making her reactivity to war casualties a very unique trait that she could not share with other members of the public.

Zahra has often been seen as the symbol of Lebanon, the nation ravaged by civil war.[64] While such readings critique the men in the novel for refusing to acknowledge her individual needs, and while they mention that this is a female Bildungsroman, such readings do not give much value to Zahra's agency in her own narrative. I believe that the structural aspects of this novel that make it belong to the Bildungsroman/Confessional tradition invite us to study Zahra's own narrative of personal progress and her struggle to become a unique individual. Zahra does not *want* to belong to other groups such as women, Shiites, Muslims, etc. In fact, Zahra's voice self-reflexively emerges to resist such an automatised interpretation of her story from her readers: "I am certain I am another creature that doesn't belong to the gender of women… how is it rational to compare me with that woman?" (al-Shaykh, 1980: 217). She understands that seeing her as a victim of men distorts the truth, especially the truth about her husband Mājid. She warns us of this: "Poor Mājid, how I've allowed them to draw conclusions about you!" The implied author of *Ḥikāyat Zahra* (1980) is aware of how her novel invites feminist critiques, and constructs the character of Zahra as one adamant to resist them. This is not to deny that a real woman in Zahra's position would be constituted by multiple discourses and circumstances. In this novel, however, the ambivalent confessional voice repeats caveats about seeing her as a victim of continuous

[64] See Adams (2001) and Accad (1990).

violations by the men in her life and the author constructs a plot that is driven by Zahra's many manipulative and deceptive choices.[65] In other words, *Ḥikāyat Zahra,* the novel with a very intricate interior monologue, is meant to construct an exceptional female character, and not one that can readily be used to symbolise the status of women in a patriarchal society or an entire nation during a war.

There is a strong trend in all of the post-1967 novels for the characters to refuse emphatically to be grouped with others, and great lengths are taken to describe how becoming part of a community or participating in collective action is impossible. What is portrayed as the character's authentic self cannot be permanently changed to fit collective goals or ideological requirements. Examples of this are numerous and tend to share certain stylistic patterns. For example, in all of the biographical novels of political activism in this study, the confessional 'I' dissolves into a collective confession *temporarily*. This can be considered to be an identifying, stable marker of the subgenre. When this happens, the narrative tone also transforms. Zahra uses the plural to describe her actions during the war. The war binds her together with others: "*We* would not dare to think that a ceasefire meant a truce…*we* would hear the news" (my italics, al-Shaykh, 1980: 144). The war gives Zahra a community. This is the first time we see Zahra doing something not only courageous but without any ulterior motives: "I punished myself for all the anxiety that I mistook for anxiety before the war, the misery that I mistook for misery, the pain I mistook for pain. All of these were illusions or mere scratches. *Maybe because they weren't part of a collective pain*" (my italics, 158). Her brother explains to her that collective acts change the significance of an action; when he's "under the influence of the mob", killing others cannot be called a crime (163). Her brother's words exemplify the trend in the contemporary novel to portray collective actions suspiciously. For Zahra, this phase of being dissolved in the collective can only be experienced as a result of much self-deception, and is therefore only temporary. In the end she is alone, precisely like the male political activists.

Iʿtirāfāt Kātim Ṣawt (literally Confessions of the Silencer of the Voice) (1986) is a narrative that pivots on the attempt of an assassin to confess his sins to a

[65] See also Ghandour (2002) for an elaborate example of such a reading.

prostitute. Despite its title, this novel does not strictly belong to the genre of the confessional novel. Firstly, there is a diffusion of numerous confessional voices that seem to explode and proliferate in the text, and therefore, although the actual confession of the assassin takes place in the middle of the narrative it does not tie it together. This novel aims to be a decentred confession of a people. In a similar manner to *Sharq al-Mutawassiṭ*, it is a political confession of voices that refuse to be silenced, not the more traditional confession about self-discovery. The Jordanian al-Razzāz writes a novel with a postmodern characteristic of multiple and layered voices, including the voices of several readers at the end. However, what he calls the "circle of voices" actually confines each voice to a singular message or idea and therefore leaves us with a multitude of character *types* associated with the subgenre (idealist, traitor, victim, oppressor…etc).

Khālid in *Dhākirat al-Jasad* (1988) idolises Algeria's martyrs; however, Aḥlām, the daughter of one, finds this enervating precisely because martyrdom eradicated their individuality. As a consequence, she remains interested in famous people's personal biographies rather than their work or their fame. She feels like the greatest artists make their life story into a piece of art in the manner of the definition of Bildung, while people's interest generally lies in the person's usefulness to the public (see Chapter One). She tells Khālid: "There are artists that think it suffices to put their greatness into their work. Others sign their lives as well with the same genius. They leave behind a unique autobiography, not liable to imitation or forgery" (Mustaghānimī, 1988: 143). Her charismatic and loving father would have no such luck because, she realises, "death equalized all martyrs" (103). She attempts to explain to Khālid, referring to Algeria's million martyrs, that "at times [she] feel[s] she is a daughter of a number, a number between a million and a million and a half" (104). But he insists on telling her the story of her father the legend, while she attempts to find the story of the man behind it. In retrospect, Khālid does acknowledge the errors of his ideals about national unity; he recognises that he had not been cautious enough to realise that the name of the country *al-Jaza'ir* (Algeria) is a "singular-plural noun" that was destined to be divided (37).

One of the major events in *'Aṭyāf* (1999) is Raḍwā ᶜĀshūr''s discovery that an entire class of students cheated on an exam. The cheating incident enrages

this protagonist with socialist tendencies not because of the deception that cheating entails but because when all of the students wrote precisely the same answers, the result was mediocrity. To make matters worse, when the students defended themselves, each said they were doing what everybody else was doing and were unable "to resist the current" (ᶜĀshūr', 1999: 114). She asks herself why she pardoned them of responsibility. This kind of attitude, what she calls "collusion" is "corruption…has the salt of the earth now been corrupted?" (115). In other words, she considers the lack of individuality and the avoidance of individual responsibility as corruption. This becomes more evident when the Dean of her department blames her, the Professor (in the position of authority) and not the students (on the grounds that her exams were too predictable and explained the identical answers). The narrative tone is critical of the Dean's reaction and demonstrates how blaming the person in position of authority became a way of evading the individual responsibility of each cheating student.

Rashīd's purposeful shifts between the plural form and the singular form are meant to affirm his rediscovered sense of uniqueness and individuality. This device disturbs the beliefs of the communist party in which he was active for most of his youth. Any sense of clarity strikes Rashīd *alone*, in the singular form, as opposed to what Rashīd narrates as the trite and ideologically laden party rhetoric, which is always narrated in the plural form: "*We* moved with the speed of lightening from 'surplus value' to the 'historical role' of the working class in manufacturing this surplus…*We* were horsemen…*We* grasped the reigns of history" (my italics, al-Ḍaᶜīf, 1999: 5-6)[66]. More significantly, the plural form is usually in full force when the actions being narrated are violent in nature, whereas the personal form describes his own philosophical ideas. He alerts Kawabata, and the readers, to this shift: "Then it dawned on me - note I'm back to the personal pronoun - that we were good at words, and not at the world" (al-Ḍaᶜīf, 1995: 13).[67] After he dies during a random attack on a bus, he realises that although he had rejected heroism before he hates having died en masse, and he wishes that he didn't have to hear people mourning the person buried next to him. Like Aḥlām and Khālid in *Dhākirat al-Jasad* he finds it paradoxical that party members wanted to give less value to the individual and

[66] Paul Starkey's 1999 translation
[67] My translation.

yet revered martyrs; he realises at the height of the war that “martyrs are in the tens of thousands, and only a few of them are special” (176). Rashīd the present narrator cannot be dissolved in any ideological narrative, neither will any such narrative become a “natural impulse” for him.

Al-Birrī’s (2001) most systematic attack on *al-Jamāᶜa al-Islāmiyya* is not directly related to its propensity for violence but its insistence on group identity and its rejection of individuality. He explains the importance of football in recruitment of new members: “Football lovers from *al-Jamāᶜa al-Islāmiyya* sons used to involve others in this team sport that cannot be played with one or two or even three players” (al-Birrī, 2001: 24). Their power is in the numbers. By the end of the novel he declares; “I – Khālid– am not a number, and I will never be just a number” (236). With this statement, he destructs the very possibility of group action. While he had recognised his uniqueness all along, at the end of the novel he boasts of it. He outlines the reason he picks up secular readings after he leaves *al-Jamāᶜa*:

> An individual’s strength in a humanist sense is that he is genetically, philosophically, psychologically and socially different from any other individual in the world. That carries within it the potential for this individual to make a qualitative change, instead of the quantitative one… We are always warned of vanity….a thousand forces are ready to wage a war on the vanity of an individual, to oppose it, habilitate it, lead it. There is also an internal mechanism by which vanity pays the price of lack of self-development. But nobody ever warns us of an excess of humility…of accepting the authority of those who are not better than you, who granted themselves power, and who consider themselves braver than you (235-236).

In emphasising the dangers of being incorporated into a community of others, the characters also narrate the impossibility of that truly taking place. Authentic selves are not liable to being dissolved into larger entities. In the prototypes, the characters are easily converted from their conventional and fearful ways to steadfast activism. This inevitable conversion is a one-time affair; it is irreversible. In the post-1967 novel there are two transformations in this genre pattern. In al-Dīb, Mustaghānimī, ᶜĀshūr’, and al-Razzāz, the memory of early activism is pleasant but it is *its transience* that is portrayed as inevitable instead of its occurrence. Another pattern that emerges in al-Ḍaᶜīf, al-Shaykh and al-Birrī is the narration of the very long and arduous process that leads the character to behave in a manner that is not authentic to him or her.

The extreme difficulty of the task of changing ‘given traits’ foreshadows its eventual failure. In this pattern, typical of the genre of the confessional novel as a whole, a full circle returns the character to a point of origin, usually one in early childhood preceding the stage of adolescence in which they joined movements and therefore entrenching the concept of the authentic self that is central to the ideology of individualism.

For instance, Zahra feels that finding the sources of her chronic fear will help her forge a new existence for herself. By discovering and revealing the sources of her fear, she seems to hope she can transform it. There are several instances in the novel where she seems to have changed. Her attempts to distract a sniper from killing others by sleeping with him appear brave. While she is on the roof with the sniper and experiences sex positively for the first time her thoughts evolve. She envisions her father as weak and broken, and even wills him in her imagination to come and watch how liberated she feels during sex. But the progress in her thoughts is incomplete. Every progress she makes is met by a set-back where she returns to her original undesirable ‘given traits. ’

We realise at the end of the novel that Zahra did not change too much. Dorothy Hale (2006) claims that some of the sources of any novel’s unity derive from the “path out of self-blindness to self-awareness” and “a process of oscillation between self-blindness and insight and back” (9). *Ḥikāyat Zahra* is a good example of this: whereas in the beginning of the novel, she is characterised by extreme fear, passiveness and confusion, she later struggles to grasp some understanding of her world and to create a new sense of herself, only to find herself falling back into her previous state. One of her given characteristics is her ability to be exceptionally manipulative and to harm others with no qualms. She goes so far to admit she loves the war because it brings her to life whereas it kills others (it allows her to live alone). Interestingly, al-Shaykh makes acting in self-interest one of Zahra’s inherent traits. So, while she initially claims to be making regular visits to the sniper to prevent him from killing, Zahra eventually coming to terms with her selfishness.

> I started to ask what was I doing here, sprawling the floor’s the dirt and dust. What was I here for? Could I say I had been able to save anyone? …I couldn’t raise any of my former

> interest in looking at newspapers or counting the number of victims. Was I some vulture become human, or had the devil taken human form in me?" (al-Shaykh, 1980: 188-9)

Zahra is beginning to understand her true motivations for seeing Sāmī: she was never there to save the people in her street, her reasons were sexual all along, but never owns up to this completely.[68] Even Zahra's supposed altruism is selfish in nature.

In al-Dīb (1980), hedonism is al-Misīrī's most prominent given trait. Even as an old man he feels that rebellion is life: "I thought that the silence of the body was a sign of health. I do not suffer from an illness or any bitterness now, I do not have any rebellions or objections…Could it be possible that the silence of the body is a sign of death?" (al-Dīb, 1980: 4). He enjoys going to seedy cafes that sell drugs because lawlessness gives him a sense of innocence and liveliness. He thinks that "doing anything practical is idiotic. He can't find an excuse for it" (121). Al-Misīrī seems to suffocate if forced to think about the humdrum details of conventional work and marriage. His love for Munā al-Māṣrī was magical as long as it was outside convention and was opposed to religious practices (as they were from different religions) and class considerations (she was rich, he was not). They went on trips to Nubia to write poetry and enjoy nature. Their relationship fails when it becomes a marriage and the couple move into a home:

> And now what? Good food lost its taste. The dreamy words [of love, poetry, revolution…etc] kept her away from her family, and the friends she was brought up with, and the visits to church that gave her spirit some comfort. The comrades also became distant. They became busy with their own lives, and she was left alone in a deserted downtown flat (99).

It is difficult to miss the author's implied point about the contradiction between the suppression of individuality that al-Misīrī's political thought necessitates and his stubborn individuality. During the previously mentioned recurrent genre motif of the drunken argument, activists point out each other's "bourgeois manners….giant egos…[and] arrogance" (49). Another repeated motif in this sub-genre is the necessity of suppressing the authentic self and its dignity to belong to a movement. This struggle is very subdued in al-Dīb's work;

[68] See Valassopoulos (2003) for more on Zahra's sexual motivations and how critics deny female writers' attention to sexuality by focusing on seemingly more important nationalistic causes.

it is found in how the narrative slips fleetingly into first person narration only to return quickly to the third person. al-Misīrī's refusal to use the overtly confessional "I" is evidence of his reluctance to acknowledge his "giant ego" and celebrate it the way the protagonists do in *ᶜAzīzī al-Sayyid Kawābātā* (1995) and *al-Dunya 'Ajmal Min al-Janna* (2001). He is aware that the internal struggle between the rebellious politics of his youth and the happiness of conventional life is "his own personal corruption…there is no heroism or pride in [it]," but is unable to purify himself of this un-heroic corruption (121). In this respect, his is similar to Khālid in *Dhākirat al-Jasad* (1988), who is proud of his own failures because they signify he has not succumbed to what he perceives as the corrupt spirit of the age. Most importantly, al-Misīrī's previous glorification of martyrdom in the name of the nation has dissolved into his current yearning for a time when his ex-wife told him: "You are the centre of the universe, you are the heart of the world" (60). These words highlight his ambivalence and the author's hidden interior polemic. His past glorification of uniformity and self-sacrifice conflicted with his longing to become the centre of the universe and to use the confessional "I". This anxiety about centrality can be sensed in al-Ḍaᶜīf's novel as well. Al-Dīb, bringing the protagonist at the end of the novel to the exact place where he started, seems to predict that it is a conflict al-Misīrī will never be able to resolve.

In al-Razzāz (1988), the doctor and his son complain that life without political involvement is "superfluous." This adjective signifies the importance of political activity to them as fictional character types. Although political activity usually functions by placing one among a group and therefore gives one an identity, its exaggerated importance in these novels to the point that life without it is deemed superfluous is indicative of what Gregory Castle (2006) calls a non-identitarian self. In this subgenre political activity provides the authentic self with "the compelling 'thing' that one dies for out in the open…that 'thing' which cannot be exhausted in normative social relations, that nonidentity….[which is the] secret that the modernist Bildungsroman narrates" (Castle, 2006: 248).

Khālid in *Dhākirat al-Jasad* (1993) finds "the compelling thing" in his dream of an Algerian nation. This desire gives Khālid his memorable personality. He is an artist, an idealist and a romantic. Yet he finds it difficult to change his habits to fit into the ideology that he embraced; forcing himself (and Aḥlām) to speak

in Arabic instead of French and taking up painting instead of writing because he refuses to write in French are accomplished with a lot of effort. Khālid is willing to change what he is talented at and the very language that he speaks in order to adhere to what he believes in. He sacrifices these 'given traits' for his cause but these sacrifices are portrayed as extreme: the flesh on the young man's amputated arm carries in it memories of his previous self that he violently lost to a cause. Because, as I mentioned earlier, this novel is sympathetic to Algeria's war veterans and shares some sympathies with commitment writing, Khālid's efforts are somewhat successful. It is a bittersweet success when society shows no appreciation for the extreme lengths he underwent to adopt this new identity.

In al-Ḍaᶜīf (1995) and al-Birrī's (2001) novels, the motif of the extreme hardship of changing the abstract individual's personality to comply with the party's requirements is maximised. Rashīd and the other members of his party mock each other for appearing to have "bourgeois" interests, reminiscent of *Zahr al-Laymūn's* (1980) arguments. The individual "bourgeois" desire to have a full head of hair and a beautiful square in the city is deemed illegitimate by the progressive, leftist representative of the will of the people, the anonymous double. The double reproaches his followers that they did not "dissolve in the worker's cause, and [they] hadn't become adapted to it enough that it would be a natural impulse for [them]" (al-Ḍaᶜīf, 1995: 152). Rashīd narrates that as a member of his party he needed not only to oppose his own individual instincts but his community and his past, to "cut the umbilical cord with my yearning for the countryside, and not to ever long for my mother's olives" (167). He even insists on eating out at restaurants to forget the taste of homemade food. His political beliefs permeate every aspect of his life, but they never erased what Rashīd presents as an authentic self that was there from the beginning. The double's criticism of his followers on the grounds of their corrupted "natural impulses" is the cause of much distress for Rashīd. This autobiography seems to read like a defence of the character's own "natural impulses" and a justification for not being capable of transforming them.

The same can be said for *al-Dunya 'Ajmal Min al-Janna.* Al-Birrī uses a large amount of narrative space to explain the process of transformation it took to become a member of *al-Jamaᶜa*. Despite *al-Jamaᶜa's* efforts, the authenticity of

the individual is something al-Birrī portrays as organic, spontaneous and inescapable. As the process of transformation is taking place, he consistently tries to downplay his new acquired identity every time it threatens to become a permanent way of life. For example, *al-Jamāᶜa* insist on a change of language; "friends" become "brothers." They also insist on him eating with his fingers and sitting in a specific way that he is not accustomed to. When he decides on the ultimate coming out move, wearing a short *jilbāb* instead of his regular clothes, he describes it "as a very heavy step" (al-Birrī, 2001: 80). Al-Birrī highlights the absurdity of suppressing one's sexual desires (greatly emphasised in the character of the gay member of the group). Sexual desire in this novel mirrors other forms of the spontaneous desires of the individual; attempting to control it or change it results in both hypocrisy and failure. He explains how the leader of this extreme religious group that prohibits art and entertainment in most forms subtly manipulated him into letting go of them:

> What does it mean for you to do away with the Abdul Ḥalim Ḥāfiz's tapes that you were raised to listen to? His songs played in the kitchen and your mother sang them. What does it mean for you to do away with TV and the family gathering around it? You have lines from movies memorized by heart and you use plays to inspire your jokes. You scream with happiness when your football team scores a goal. Television entertains you in your boredom and helps you fall asleep. What does it mean for you to stop telling your secrets to those childhood friends you were brought up with? What does it mean for you to do away with your career ambitions and to endanger your prospects? It didn't mean anything to me (21).

Yet, the heaviness of this acquired identity never succeeds in crushing his authentic self. He always stresses his own idiosyncrasies. When he is advised to stop making sexual jokes, he refuses. He says "maybe I did that out of stubbornness, or maybe I really could not change myself" (165). Despite *al-Jamāᶜa's* insistence on the denial of the self and his own great efforts to subdue his own desires and proclivities, Khālid is unable to shape himself into an identity defined by the group: "In my case it was a part of the chronic crisis with myself, and it created the feeling that my heart would not be comforted one hundred per cent, and therefore I would never be a real committed believer" (168). This idea of not being able to be committed (*multazim*) is often repeated in the text. It is portrayed as an impossible task.

Al-Jamāᶜa temporarily destroys Khālid's personal pleasures and his private life. He shows that it was easy for them to do that precisely because of his

young age and his complete lack of experience in life. In this Bildungsroman, maturity prevails upon youth. The novel fully explores the excesses of a rebel who does not completely appreciate or understand what he is missing in life (in culture, education, romantic relationships, career opportunities, entertainment). So, while the lack of a fulfiling personal life facilitates *al-Jama'a's* influence on him, his departure from them is eventually facilitated by his desire for a complete sense of self and freedom.

Obstacles to full self-cultivation, based on one's "natural impulses" in these novels are often the result of one's own choices. Even obstacles to self-actualisation are chosen, since there are seldom any external forces compelling the characters to choose to belong to these groups. In the prototypes, oppressive Arab states and colonial powers presented hurdles to characters' paths of self-development. In the hypertexts, the state presents less of a threat to the individual than the person himself or than society at large. A good example of this is to be found in al-Razzāz (1986). This writer chooses one of individualistic ideology's central tenets, the sanctity of privacy, as social critique. In his novel a lieutenant is so fearful that the state is watching him in his own home that he escapes to have sex with his wife elsewhere. During the act, he finds a multitude of neighbours' eyes watching him from the curtainless windows. The state is somehow exonerated from blame for people's feelings of fear. The author writes the word "they" in quotation marks intentionally when referring to the eyes that are watching; thereby pointing out "their" nebulous nature. All of society seems to be complicit in a perverse voyeurism, not just the state. The state is an institution of individuals that such a society, which has no respect for privacy, is capable of producing.

Above I discussed how in commitment literature, as in *Sharq al-Mutawassiṭ's* (1975) self-reflexive example, literary writing is a vehicle for the documentation of social ills and injustices. It is very striking that in all the hypertextual novels, literary writing is for the purposes of creative self-representation. In biographical novels, an artistic form of self-representation often features as a recurrent motif (see Chapter One). So, in *Sharq al-Mutawassiṭ*, we read about Rajab writing the very text we are now reading, and we understand that the writer means for us to read it as a tangible document on torture in Arab prisons. In *Dhākirat al-Jasad,* Mustaghānimī offers a self-reflexive exposition on the writing of both

collective and personal histories. Writing for Khālid becomes a self-defining act: “I need to finally find the words I will become written in” (Mustaghānimī, 1988: 9). Zahra keeps a diary, perhaps the text we are reading as well. Zahra is so self-engrossed that she could not have cared about sharing her life story and we feel we are peeping into a very private world. It is a diary she wrote to define herself for herself, and not the reader. In the more recent novels, creative self-representation is its own goal.

Rashīd in al-Ḍaᶜīf’s (1995) epistolary novel chooses a specific narratee, the Japanese writer Kawabata, to hear his confession. By choosing a specified creative writer from outside his country and literary culture altogether, Rashīd aims for his personal story to be shared with a person he thinks is capable of appreciating it as an artistic product, as he often states in the text, and as a story of just one individual and not many. There is a desire to connect with Kawabata as a human being, rather than a member of a nation. In the prototypes, *al-Bāb al-Maftūḥ* and *Sharq al-Mutawassiṭ*, the implied reader is a member of a nation and is one that is imagined as being capable of understanding the message of this text as novel/historical document. Perhaps this implied reader can react to it in the manner Raḍwā does in *ʻAṭyāf* (1999) by taking direct political action. In *ᶜAzīzī al-Sayyid Kawābātā*, the choice of a Japanese author, and not an Arab one, also implies that Rashīd’s story is felt to be significant on some universal level, encompassing more than current socio-political events such as the war in Lebanon. At the height of such an aggressive war, the implied author insists on presenting a personal story rather than a straight forward historical document on the war, as a commitment writer would have done. Seigneurie (2011) has elaborated at length on this phenomenon in the Lebanese novel.[69]

From the preface, al-Birrī (2001) offers us an autobiographical pact – or an agreement that the text is non-fictional – with a twist. Firstly, he warns the reader who approaches the text in order to read about the militant activities of the terrorist organisation to steer clear of his novel. For him, it is not meant to be a tale of exotic and strange events in this fundamentalist organisation, but rather his own personal story. He refuses for his personal story to be presented

[69] See Seigneurie (2004) for more on Kawabata as narratee.

or rendered as an ‘example’ of something more collective or more general. Secondly, al-Birrī stresses simultaneously that this autobiography has become a piece of literature, or *sīra dhātiyya riwā’iyya* (autobiographical novel) through a long editorial process in which he changed the meaning of the original, chronological and historical document, as the text we are now reading is an adaptation of a series of diary entries he had previously published. Al-Birrī’s introduction stresses that the autobiographical novel as a piece of creative *fiction* is more valuable as his own version of truth; the only version he has learnt to trust. This is a characteristic that Stephen Guth (1998) demonstrates that many Arabic autobiographical novels of the period at hand have in common. By stressing the importance of his own experience of truth and by celebrating this literary product as a novel rather than a historical document, al-Birrī shows his complete conversion from the ideology of the fundamentalist *al-Jamāᶜa al-Islāmiyya;* a party labelled as a terrorist organisation by Egypt, the United States and the European Union. It is an organisation that monopolises claims to truth and that attacks most forms of creative art. Al-Birrī fights back with culture in the form of literary autobiography where a personal narrative critiques collective narratives. Finally, al-Birrī offers his narrative of self-creation as resistance and revelation. Self-revelation is the utmost attack on the secrecy imposed by the organisation. He says he feels pain that he is divulging the secrets of others in his autobiography but “my pain won’t compel me to apologize and won’t prevent me from speaking” (al-Birrī, 2006: 9). For him, as the unapologetic caveat in the preface shows, self-expression and self-revelation are resistance.

While typical *Iltizām* fiction was written as an example of and as a means to national resistance to colonial powers or oppressive states, the more recent biographical novel is written as means to protecting the individual against the tyranny of the collective. This will become even clearer as I present how each of the hypertextual novels in this chapter critiqued discourses on Arab unity, socialism and secularism in this region. But before that, I would like to elaborate on one more of the important motifs of the confessional novel: the double as an artistic vehicle for the destruction of the wholesome individual.

II. The double(s) as the ideological other and its challenge to selfhood

The double is a conventional literary vehicle employed in various types of written texts. Andrew J. Weber (1996) sums up nine characteristics of the *Doppelgänger* in his study of its presence in modern German literature. Many of his observations are relevant to a discussion of the contemporary Arabic novel. A few are pertinent to this section, while the remainder are more relevant in Chapter Six:

> In the visual field the autoscopic, or self-seeing, subject beholds its other self as another, as visual object, or alternatively is beheld as object by its other self… Accordingly, my third premiss must be given as performance: the *Doppelgänger* is an inveterate performer of identity*. Selfhood as a metaphysical given is abandoned here to a process of enactments of identity always mediated by the other self…*The seventh premiss is that of return and repetition. The *Doppelgänger* returns compulsively both within its host texts and intertextually from one to the other (my italics, Weber, 3-4).

It will be my intention in this section to show that in the novels I have selected, the double serves to show the possibility of performing identity as Weber notes above. However, it is very significant that although the other features of the double that Weber describes are valid for the novels in my study; I argue that the presence of a double that mediates a new, constructed identity for the self does not imply that "selfhood as a metaphysical given has been abandoned". On the contrary, the self's ability to imitate (or be) the double temporarily is purposefully exposed for what it is in the hypertexts: a performance, or an act, that ultimately fails because there is an ideological implication that *selfhood is a given*. To reiterate the caution I gave in the previous chapter, this thesis is not one in which I explore questions about authentic selfhood, but rather one in which I analyse how it is constructed in a selection of biographical novels. As Girard (2006) explains, spontaneous desire is an illusion that even "a great novel does not succeed in shattering" (302).

As mentioned above, in the prototypical novels the conversion of characters was a one-time affair. *Al-Bāb al-Maftūḥ* and *Sharq al-Mutawassiṭ* do not feature doubles as a complex literary device. There are mentors (Ḥusayn in the former, Hādī in the latter, and Rajab himself to others) that the character desires or imitates because of their courage and idealism. Then there are foils: opposites that highlight choices that are not desirable for the protagonist (Layla's family

and Rajab's conventional friends and family members). In *al-Bāb al-Maftūḥ*, the protagonist's decision to embrace an identity is (optimistically) possible. In *Sharq al-Mutawassiṭ*, 'Anīsa (Rajab's sister) story of initiation into activism echoes of Layla's own. Initially afraid of the consequences of joining the resistance, both women follow the paths set out by the male activists that are significant to them (lover in former, brother in latter) because the alternative is no longer feasible. There is no open ending here; the reader knows that this character's transformation is final. Layla and 'Anīsa (and the minor character Ḥāmid in *Sharq al-Mutawassiṭ*) have chosen new identities and they have diverged from the path conventionally set out for them. Even if 'Anīsa fails in her actions as her brother ultimately did, she has successfully transformed her beliefs. To sum up, despite their simplicity as mentors and foils, the minor characters in the prototypical novels result in a major change in the main character. They successfully mediate the transformation into a new identity.

In the hypertextual novels, there appears to be two basic structures for the double that are there in every narrative. The first double is another character(s) that shares some similarities with the self, especially the same political activity or ideology. This double can be easily contrasted with the mentor in the prototypical novels. Instead of motivating characters to evolve into new selves, doubles in the hypertextual novels cause the protagonist much self-doubt and self-loathing. Protagonists become petty and suffer from immense envy in their attempts to imitate or compare themselves to the double. The exposition of the envious self seems to be an important goal of the narrative. As Dumont (1986) and others have observed, envy is a prominent emotion in the individualist worldview. By maximising that emotion to such exaggerated extents, these novels confirm their belonging to this paradigm. This is a feature of all the hypertextual novels in this dissertation. René Girard (2006) explains the dynamics of envy and "aggravated mediation" in his theory of mimetic desire. Envy is a type of mimetic desire and a:

> Spiritual poison in the passionate imitation of individuals who are fundamentally our equals and whom we endow with an arbitrary prestige. If the *modern* emotions flourish, it is not because "envious natures" and "jealous temperaments" have unfortunately and mysteriously increased in number but because *internal* mediation triumphs in a universe where the differences between men are gradually erased (Girard, 2006: 301).

Girard's initial contention is that all desires besides the most basic human instincts are mimetic, and that the triangle of subject, mediator and desired object structures modern fiction. Axthelm (1990) recognises the double as an essential character in the confessional novel. Therefore, it is important to interpret the significance of this structure in the hypertexts that concern us here.

A good example to start with is the anonymous double in *ʿAzīzī al-Sayyid Kawābātā.* This character is so important in the novel that he features in the opening passage and in Rashīd's first letter to Kawabata. We are reading this autobiographical novel, then, to understand the relationship between the narrator and the double. No other novel in this study so openly describes the hatred toward the mediator that Girard recognises. Rashīd admits that: "seeing him fills me with an intolerable rage" and "I hate him, Mr Kawabata" (al-Ḍaʿīf, 1995, 11, 9).[70] Al-Ḍaʿīf purposefully created the character of this double by drawing on a rich literary convention; the narrator often delves into a comparison between their physical appearance. The narrator suffers a disproportionate degree of anxiety because the double is slightly taller than him, has a full head of hair and appears classier than him. The double serves to amplify Rashīd's tumultuous inner life: the confessional novel's typical emotional ailments of self-contempt, rage, guilt and envy are embodied in this anonymous character.[71]

But the present day Rashīd, the one currently narrating this story, has reached a degree of self-knowledge that allows him to unravel his mysterious obsession with the man. In retrospect, he wonders if the double was really those few centimetres taller. Rashīd questions if the "arbitrary prestige" he endowed the double with had any foundations in reality (Girard, 301). Rashīd realises that it is impossible for his double to really exist, that he must have "invented him, assembled his component parts from similar features common to many other people" (al-Ḍaʿīf, 1995: 3). This observation in the opening pages is evidence that the narrator has already accomplished the goal of the confessional novel: self-discovery. He discovered that he squandered many years imitating the double and envying him for qualities he had only imagined him as possessing. But this significant discovery does not serve to undermine

[70] My translation.
[71] See Axthelm (1967).

Rashīd's autonomy. On the contrary, it is Rashīd who "invented" and "assembled" this illusion. I have already discussed how disillusionment becomes integral to a reading of any modern Bildungsroman, but *ᶜAzīzī al-Sayyid Kawābātā* offers us a disillusionment that paradoxically declares a victory: it confirms how the narrative of Rashīd's life has always been his own creation. To rephrase Girard's (2006) observation, the implied author may judge the phase of Rashīd's imitation disapprovingly, but by presenting it as having emanated from Rashīd's autonomous decisions to "invent" and "assemble," the implied author never shatters the illusion of spontaneous desire.

When Rashīd meets his double on the street he is infuriated not just by the double's hypocrisy but because the similarities he'd invented between him and the double disturbed the integrity of his self, made him lose his "unity, the togetherness of [his] body parts"(al-Ḍaᶜīf, 1995: 7-8). If anything, Rashīd's discovery is that *mimetic desire is the illusion* that was a threat to his authentic, wholesome self. By imitating the desires of another, Rashīd was guilty of threatening his own unity. The narrative that is born from Rashīd's fury at his discovery is directed toward differentiating Rashīd from his double and giving value to himself as an individual, as the hero of this work (after he had denounced heroism to comply with the double's communistic belief system). A noteworthy point of comparison with Ṣaliḥ's 1966 classic *Mawsim al-Ḥijra ilā 'l-Shamāl* is that al-Ḍaᶜīf's work features an anonymous double, while in Ṣaliḥ it is the narrating self who has no name. In the older classic, the protagonist grapples for self-definition vis-à-vis Muṣṭafa Saᶜīd until the very end of the novel. In al-Ḍaᶜīf's 1995 novel, written three decades later, it is the narrator/author who has a clear understanding of himself from the beginning, and the anonymous double who has a nebulous existence.

Al-Ḍaᶜīf's novel provides an elaborate example of how the double in the selected novel serves to validate the individualist concept of the authentic self. Envious feelings toward doubles also unveil the character's failures. Al-Kharrāṭ (1993) notes that all other characters in *Zahr al-Laymūn* mirror elements of al-Misīrī. Al-Misīrī meets several ex-radicals and artists like himself in his day trip to Cairo. Unlike him they have done well for themselves, making money in business ventures or by becoming celebrity artists. His brother, an Islamist

political activist, has settled into their family house and asks if al-Misīrī intends to join him. Al-Misīrī reacts vehemently to these characters. Interestingly in this novel, the main female character, Munā al-Māṣrī, is also doubled. The author purposefully posits Munā and Firyāl as two different feminine types. Munā is hedonistic and carefree, Firyāl is conventional and grounded. Munā is even uncomfortable during Firyāl's wedding because of Firyāl's "kindness and happiness" which she finds "intolerable" (al-Dīb, 1980: 57). Whereas Firyāl converted poverty into excess, Munā is rich yet does not accept luxury. Munā is unsettled, does not know what she wants and changes her mind (signifying the fickleness of al-Misīrī's perceived nation's aspirations). The younger al-Misīrī was attracted to Munā; the older defeated man seems fascinated with the way Firyāl transformed Fatḥi Nūr's life. The younger al-Misīrī rejoiced in roaming with Munā but the older one finds himself thinking he "must have a house, he must have a nation" (65). In this novel, mirroring and doubling highlight the many choices available to al-Misīrī. In order for a character to act as a double, there have to be sufficient points of comparison. The character and the double have to be perceived as equals in some way. Al-Misīrī's doubles are all viable options for himself, and so are the two feminine types as romantic interests. The fact that al-Misīrī stubbornly insists on remaining the way he is does not undermine the freedom of choice the implied author has created in his life. A similar effect is created in al-Razzāz's (1986) novel. Yūsuf's central confession in the text is evidence of his exaggerated antipathy toward Aḥmad and the doctor, but the three characters serve to present the alternatives available not simply to be an activist or not as in the other novels but to be a revolutionary activist with integrity or an assassin.

In Mustaghānimī (1988), Girard's triangular desire is excellently translated into Khālid's obsession with Aḥlām's imagined affair with Ziyād the Palestinian freedom fighter. Khālid feels immense envy toward this healthy love rival. As Girard (2006) shows in his description of the mechanism of triangular desire the object, Aḥlām, is arbitrary. It is Ziyād, still able to write poetry successfully in his native tongue, engaged in a real struggle for independence and still able-bodied, that holds the secrets to Khālid's anxiety. Brilliantly, Mustaghānimī demonstrates how Khālid's struggle is a mimesis of Ziyād's, as I will elaborate in the next section. The choice to participate in a struggle for an independent

nation symbolised in Aḥlām is made through the imitation of other national struggles. But, true to Girard's expectation of a good novelist, Mustaghānimī always reminds the reader of the illusory nature of Khālid's obsession. Khālid never reaches a conclusion about whether the affair took place, just as he never consummates his relationship with Aḥlām. Khālid's narrative is one of desire; at times spontaneous, at others mimetic, and never attaining its object.

Girard claims that a mature novel does away with the object of desire and focuses on the subject's relationship with the mediator. Al-Birrī (2001) also eliminates the mediator and focuses on *mimetic beliefs*. He exposes the process by which, as a child, he assimilated the dominant sociolect about Arab nationalism and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The young boy's opinions were borrowed and imitated: his joy over Sadat's assassination and outrage at those entering mosques with shoes. The older narrative voice presents the accepted cultural codes involving "the unity of the Arab peoples" and their strength as a kind of myth that proliferates through repetition (al-Birrī, 2001: 22). He claims "it is hard to know why a person likes what they like" and al-Birrī the present narrator realises he that he had liked those nationalistic and pan-Arab ideals through imitation, not through self-analysis or knowledge" (21). He describes his hatred of Sadat, the Camp David agreement and Israel as something "lacking in details" (22). The older voice throughout the novel seems to accept that to be an individual with authentic beliefs rather than imitated ones is to have knowledge of details, while speaking in generalities (particularly imitated ones) makes one a social type, rather than a cultivated human being.[72]

This novel minimises the role of the double as *another* character. The gay fundamentalist who is indispensable to the organisation does fulfil the role in the text, but he does not occupy a significant amount of narrative space. The description of how the protagonist felt sexually aroused while hearing the gay man's confession replicates the same dynamic of mimetic desire. The protagonist is not gay, hence the insignificance of the object of desire, but the gay man embodies the courage to transgress that he would like to emulate. The narrator desires to *be* that transgressor. Through a similar technique to the

[72] This idea echoes methodological individualism, see Dumont (1986).

one described in al-Ḍaᶜīf above, the revelation about imitated ideas and the analysis of that moment of envious desire takes us back to the self as metaphysical given. The narrator had imitated ideas that were not compatible to his given traits as an individual, and by the end of the novel he 'discovers' an ideology and a way of life that is. He always preferred to rebel and stand out and so collectivist ideologies did not suit his peculiar intrinsic characteristics. He describes his discovery of John Stuart Mill as arriving at "the promised land"; hence, it is an arrival that he feels is *chosen* for him (al-Birrī, 2001: 257). Similarly, the barriers that prevented him from transgressing the way the gay man did were self-imposed. He was the one that chose to join that organisation that prohibited his original desires and ambitions. His aggravating double, then, is no one but his previous self.

It is clear that as the subgenre matured, the literary device of the double became more significant. Its role is maximised, and its congruity with the narrating self increased. In the novels of the Eighties the role of the double is scattered in more than one character, as in al-Dīb's (1980) many ex-radical friends or Aḥmad, the doctor and Yūsuf in *'Iᶜtirāfāt Kātim Ṣawt* (al-Razzāz, 1986). In the Nineties novel, the double emerges as one significant character, as in Shajar in *'Aṭyāf* (ᶜĀshūr', 1999), or the anonymous party leader in *ᶜAzīzī al-Sayyid Kawābātā* (al-Ḍaᶜīf, 1995), or as the extreme fundamentalist version of the present, liberal narrator in *al-Dunya 'Ajmal Min al-Janna* (al-Birrī, 2001). The Nineties' novels I present here are more overtly autobiographical, and the double here is clearly meant to represent another (less desirable) version of the self. Narrative time distances the double from the narrating self in al-Ḍaᶜīf and al-Birrī. The narrator in the present time has surpassed the stage of the double, has matured beyond their political ideas and their hypocrisy. Similarly, in ᶜĀshūr', Shajar is a more reprehensible version of the self: having an identical career and political views to the author, she is more hypocritical and petty than her because the latter is capable of exposing and analysing these traits in her. The double is therefore a device through which the narrator can pass a judgement on the beliefs and actions of another version of the self. The doubles in the Eighties novels helped *the reader* to pass judgement on the character. It is easy to compare al-Misīrī and Yūsuf to their doubles and draw the conclusion

that they have made wrong choices. In the Nineties novel, the narrators have reached a level of understanding to pass the same judgement.

The double is also a device through which the Nineties' authors self-reflexively boast of their creativity. ᶜĀshūr', for example, elaborates in her autobiographical novel about the process of writing an autobiography. She explains how she is using this novel as a medium in which to discuss her views on the functions of literature and narrates the process by which she created Shajar, her double. By narrating about creating a fictional character, she narrates about herself as a writer of fiction. The same questions about writing about this other version of the self are very consciously raised in al-Birrī and al-Ḍaᶜīf. In all of these cases, one can sense a pride in the creative process itself. The double provides an opportunity for self-parody that manifests the author's talent. This is a significant change in this sub-genre. Whereas the minor doubles in *al-Bāb al-Maftūḥ* (al-Zayyāt, 1960) and *Sharq al-Mutawassiṭ* (Munīf, 1975) were used to clarify and further underscore the politically relevant message the committed author was trying to pass on to the reader, the maximised doubles in the recent novels highlight the individual talent of the author.

III. Nationalism, socialism, secularism and their discontents for the political activist.

It is one of the claims of this thesis that a new aesthetic highlighting the value of the individual emerged to replace the discourse on nationalism and socialism associated with Arab independence movements. The social realist novel was the "royal genre" of socialist/nationalist discourse, and *Iltizām* as the literary movement associated with it (Opacki, 2000).[73] Writers and readers of the social realist novel had ideological presuppositions about the individual as belonging to a certain identity reflective of the nation, community and class that s/he was born to. *Itlizām* writers felt that their mission was to endorse many of these ideological assumptions to further their socialist/nationalist agendas, even if many did so in profoundly creative and non-formulaic ways. I have presented *al-Bāb al-Maftūḥ* and *Sharq al-Mutawassiṭ* as canonical novels related to this movement, and ones that are particularly relevant to my study because they present an in-depth biography of a fictional individual (al-Zayyāt, 1960; and Munīf, 1975). I will now proceed to describe how the contemporary novels I have selected for this study attempt to discredit nationalist/socialist discourse by launching a conflicting polemic and through transforming the genre.

One can easily deduce the many reader expectations, and models for writing, that result from the prototypical narrative of political activism. One can attempt to describe some elements of its architextuality. The discourse presents the creative artist as a rebel with a cause of freeing the nation. She will face many obstacles, she may be imprisoned or tortured. But the more unsurpassable they are, the more her resolve strengthens. She will not be alone, but will be surrounded by multitudes of like-minded, brave individuals. And yet she is a unique, memorable character. Her belief and courage will grant her personal happiness but, more importantly, they will make some tangible contribution to the struggle of the masses. Her country is not alone in this, but shares its grievances with many other countries in the region and the world. Her struggle alone will give her life meaning. The rest of this chapter will show how contemporary writers began writing ungrammatical narratives, in

[73] See Isstaif (2000).

Riffaterre's (1994) sense of the word, by distorting the straightforward model exemplified by such novels as al-Zayyāt's a*l-Bāb Al-Maftūḥ*.

In some ways, *Sharq al-Mutawassiṭ*, written in the aftermath of the shocking 1967 defeat, presented that same narrative with much less self-assurance as I explained above. Several understated features of this novel make it a precursor to the individualistic biographical narratives that follow. The idea of home or the homeland is beginning to be devalued: even if the unity of the Arab world remains intact as the title of the novel demonstrates, it is a hated and dark place. The ship that transports Rajab to Europe is symbolic of life while his homeland becomes symbolic of torture and death. Rajab's oppressive nation is unnamed to signify any nation in the region, although the reader may deduce it is Iraq (due to Munīf's autobiography). The Arab nation as an idea exists unchallenged in this novel, it is just less desirable an idea than a pre-1967 committed author would have believed it to be.

Al-Razzāz employs a similar technique. The doctor, Aḥmad and Yūsuf are in an unnamed Arab country. Their conflicts move with them across the borders to other Arab countries signifying similarity it political landscape. As mentioned in above, both Munīf and al-Razzāz come from Arab monarchies (Saudi and Jordan) and describe political realities of Arab republics in these novels. This confirms that Arab creative writers draw on elements of that literary architext described above, rather than only refer to historical facts. I have categorised al-Razzāz's novel as post-commitment although it does imply an Arab unity. One of the reasons is that it includes a hidden interior polemic against nationalist/socialist movements and parties, which is a feature of many novels in the subgenre particularly in the Eighties. Al-Razzāz achieves this is by setting up many of the central tenets of Arab nationalism as myths and outright lies. For example, Yūsuf murders Aḥmad, the idealist, for entirely personal reasons (envy). In an attempt to bestow any meaning on the young man's death, his family and the state perniciously point fingers at Mossad and other neighbouring countries. They know for a fact that this is not true, but it looks good for a young man to die fighting the Zionist enemy. Other heroic acts ring equally false in the novel. The fictional heroism of political activists is no longer visible in the Eighties novel which is more likely to present their hypocrisy.

Aḥlām Mustaghānimī uses her novel to reflect the enormity and the complications of nationalist aspirations on the lives of individuals. Though written initially in 1988, and according to my categorisation belongs to the post-commitment period, this narrative struggles to conjoin the personal narrative of Khālid the war veteran with the amputated left arm and the collective narrative of the Algerian nation. In as much as it attempts to offer a people's history, it shares some features of the earlier period of *Iltizām*. For example, Khālid explicitly names June 1967 as the beginning of a painful period both nationally and personally. He narrates that the summer of 1982 "was the beginning of personal failures and national failures all at once" when the invasion of Beirut happened "before the eyes of more than one ruler, and more than a million Arabs" (Mustaghānimī, 1988: 245). In such passages, it becomes obvious that this novel shares with commitment writing its desire to document social changes and societal problems. There is a feeling of collective humiliation: "only humiliation kills nations" (319). As Seigneurie (2011) explains, communal humiliation is a prominent motif of the mythical utopian narratives of politically motivated literature. However, *Dhākirat al-Jasad's* cumbersome interior monologue, its overwhelming mood of a defeated nation/person and its awareness of the conflict between the personal and the collective puts it firmly with other the other Arabic novels of the Eighties I present in this chapter.

Khālid's obsessive love story for the symbolic Aḥlām ("dreams") is an allegorical portrayal of the relationship between the nationalists the freed Algeria (and very significantly those of other independence movements in the region) and the object of their passion: an illusory concept of an independent nation. Mustaghānimī's figurative language is never subtle. Aḥlām is never allowed to emerge as a rounded, believable human being in the text. Khālid fixates consciously on her as his homeland, saying that at a coffee shop "flustered, the nation sits down" (85). The author presents Khālid as the complex confessional voice that has come to somehow learn, in retrospect, the falseness and violence inherent in the elaborate metaphors from which he conjured his love: "I decided to transform you into a great city, ancient, authentic and not allow midgets or pirates to reach you. I condemned you to be a certain Constantine, and condemned myself to insanity" (119). Although the protagonist in this novel is a male, words like these present the implied author's

feminist views on the patriarchal characteristic of the nationalist movement. Khālid suffers from a troubled masculinity as a result of his amputated arm and his failure to consummate his love for Aḥlām. At the end of the novel at Aḥlām's wedding, the guests parade a handkerchief with Aḥlām's blood, evidence of her virginity. Khālid sees this as evidence of his own impotence. His inability to symbolically possess the nation emasculates him. Men like him, he believes, are not fated to have any success in Arab countries because his beloved is "a city taken today by the force of armies, like all other Arab cities", and because "women, like peoples, get seduced by military uniforms, even faded ones" (365, 272). The dysfunctional left-arm of the national movement is embodied in Khālid, who loses his Aḥlām to an army general. By setting the struggle between different wings of post-independence movements as a struggle over possessing a woman's body, Mustaghānimī successfully frames it as a power struggle and not an ideological one. This feature is a recurrent one in this subgenre and one employed to subvert the ideological assumptions described above: the very existence of a variety of conflicting interests in the nation disturbs it as a utopia where masses with very similar identities and goals can peacefully reside. In this manner, Mustaghānimī and others question the nation as idea.

Furthermore, Mustaghānimī questions the motives of those radical, nationalist activists. Khālid is a highly romantic, artistic and disabled war veteran, very much a reflection of the archetypal political activist I described above. But in spite of his idealism, he is not above reproach. Khālid may have fought against oppressive French colonialists and may stand up to Algeria's present corrupt rulers, but he is guilty of hegemonic practices himself. By retelling Aḥlām memories of her own early childhood, the war hero is narrating to his beloved (or the nation) her own life story. His biography is linked to hers, he possesses the memory that she does not. He narrates and she listens as with Yūsuf and Sulāfa in al-Razzāz's novel. When Aḥlām does talk it is retold through Khālid's words. He has fought for the nation and now he has the right to possess its history. He consistently attempts to force his own personal story of suffering on to the nation: "*I won you* when you cried as you listened to your story that was also mine" (my italics, 120). Katherine's (his French lover) casual approach to relationships could not provide him with the security that an

Algerian woman, one that he feels can be possessed, can give him. His attraction to Aḥlām derives from his obsessiveness with authenticity. The bracelet he wants her to wear is “heavy and hurts [her] wrist,” like the heritage he wants her to keep (117). When she objects, he compares her to his mother who wore it without complaint. Mustaghānimī’s technique demonstrates that a certain hegemonic practice is implicit in forging the national narrative out of a personal one. When Ziyād his friend – a symbol of the Palestinian struggle – dies, Khālid reorganises and edits his posthumous poems to immortalise him. While Yūsuf’s violence as an assassin in *ʻIʿtirāfāt Kātim Ṣawt* is apparent because of his guns, Khālid’s violence is concealed by layers of romantic nationalistic sentiment.

Khālid’s obsession with authenticity is similar to al-Misīrī in al-Dīb’s novel. For a man that deplores the loss of his revolutionary days, al-Misīrī has a paradoxical obsession with “origins, lasting institutions connected to history and old traditions” (al-Dīb, 1980: 31). Khālid and al-Misīrī belong to progressive, revolutionary movements. Their attraction to tradition is portrayed by the implied authors of these novels as a paradox caused at times by ideas that are not fully thought-out and on other occasions as outright hypocrisy.

In the prototypical novels, writing about national struggles has the purpose of historical documentation and also of imaginatively constructing the very nation that is fought for. If the nationalistic writers of the previous era propagated their ideas through novels, the hypertextual novels in this study consciously attempt to dissemble the mythical constructs. The implied author of the Eighties and Nineties begins the story of a freedom fighter/radical artist a couple of decades before the actual time of writing to pass judgement on that previous generation. This hindsight was not available in the prototypical novels that present their activists as fighting for something tangible, unquestionable in its reality and importance. Conversely, Khālid is aware of the illusory construct of the nation that he made such great sacrifices for, that it was imagined even before it came into existence, and its national history constructed retrospectively: “I am not foolish enough to say I loved you at first sight. I will say I loved you before that first sight” (51). Aḥlām always wears white, and like his blank canvas her emptiness invites him to fill her with meaning: “You were empty like a sponge, and I was deep and heavy as the sea” (102). She is always an abstract

concept, something he remembers, something he desires to possess in the future, but they never have a relationship in the present. Despite his awareness that he created her according to his own imagination, he feels deceived when her actions do not live up to his expectations, saying that she "wears an apostate's attire" and "masters the art of forgery" (Mustaghānimī, 1988: 17, 48). When he draws a symbolic painting of her as a bridge, he reacts with contempt for her disappointment that he did not paint her as she really appears. For Aḥlām, the symbolism is unwelcome and the imaginary usurps the real.

Khālid's pain gives writing about the nation a different purpose than that of the nationalistic *Iltizām* writers. Throughout the novel, there is a recognition that the nation was created by language in the past, and now writing the two stories (the frame story of Khālid and Aḥlām's novel within the novel) have the reverse effect. Khālid has written a book not to imagine the nation but to cure himself of it, to "kill" it (20). The implied author is offering us another, oppositional agenda for literature. Like the prototypical novels, this novel narrates the story of a political activist. But it does not to endorse that activists' struggle. On the contrary, the implied author aims to awaken her readers from the struggles' deceptive premises. Khālid and Aḥlām engage in cathartic activities (painting and writing) that aim to cure them from memory. While the premise of committed literature is to push the reader to action, the hypertextual novels subvert heroism and idealism. Like the romantic love story in Majnun and Layla, heroic acts become the realm of literature and imagination, not real life (Mustaghānimī, 19). By committing Khālid's heroism to literature, the implied author is acknowledging its lack of existence in real life.

It is not only Algerian nationalism that is critiqued in this novel, but also Arab nationalism as a whole. Arab nationalism is a discourse that thrived on the occupation of Palestine, to the extent that reading about any national struggle in the region presupposed an already-read text of the history of the Palestinian struggle. As al-Razzāz's telling fictitious anecdote on the Mossad assassinating Aḥmad indicates, individual Arab countries' nationalisms also hinge on the Palestinian struggle, perhaps because it is the only one against a perceived foreign colonial power that is still ongoing in the region. The speech genres of Arab nationalism entail that these nationalisms nurture each other (Arabs must unite to free Palestine). In her critique, the implied author shows that they also

undermine each other. Just as Khālid forges Aḥlām's biography to suit his own dreams and aspirations, so he does for Ziyād the Palestinian upon his death. Khālid uses Ziyād's fight for freedom to further his own agenda. Furthermore, Ziyād's struggle obscures Khālid's own. As Palestine's occupation is used to holster support for a united Arab front, problems in other Arab nations receive less attention. The unity veils a competition for significance. Mustaghānimī's love triangle can be read as a political allegory of the conflict of interests within Pan-Arab movements. Ziyād's heroic struggles eclipsed Khālid's; only one of them could rationally be Aḥlām's choice.

The greatest blow to pan-Arabism in the novel is not Ziyād's death but the death of Khālid's apolitical brother, Ḥasan; the ordinary citizen. Ḥasan died from a random bullet. He did not choose to fight, and there was no foreign power to kill him. Ḥasan's real enemy is poverty, not foreign powers or even the state. Ḥasan died "by the hands of an Algerian", unlike Si Ṭahir, who was killed by the French, and Ziyād, who was killed by Israelis (Mustaghānimī, 1988: 396). In the prototypical novels, heroic acts must be performed against foreign or oppressive powers. In Mustaghānimī, the age of colonialism is gone; the violence comes from within. Khālid struggles to understand the meaning of Ḥasan's death for which the word "martyrdom" does not apply: "what do you call death when it is caused by an Arab's dagger?" (396). The destruction of Arab nationalism happens parallel to that of Algerian nationalism.

Dhākirat al-Jasad maximises the motif of the end of nationalism. Other selected novels employ it, if not to that exaggerated extent. In *ʿAzīzī al-Sayyid Kawābātā*, Rashīd consistently attempts to distance himself from what he believes to be a homogenous Arab culture. He does this first by choosing a non-Arab narratee. But he also differentiates himself from Arabs and does not identify with them the way Mustaghānimī's Khālid does. Rashīd will not be like other Arab poets, he tells Kawabata:

> We Arabs find it natural to express our suffering…Do you suppose that tears are what deprive our literature of the capacity to delve deeply into the secrets of its subjects…So far as I am concerned, I promise you straightaway that I will not let you hear weeping, that I will not complain….I will not rise up and revolt against injustice and oppression, or complain to you of the suffering of this people, trampled under the foot of reactionary regimes, the agents of colonialism, imperialism or the New crusades (10-1).

Here, Rashīd is mimicking his own past voice and shocking the implied readers with their own unchallenged presuppositions about what he as a novelist should offer. He is promising not to give us this tired rhetoric again, but to offer us literature that "delves deeply into the secrets" of his self. This confession is personal, not communal. If anything, he satirises the rhetoric that "we Arabs" use by addressing his confessions to a Japanese author, and in certain instances by comparing Arabs to Greeks, Portugese and Turks; thereby diffusing the unity of Arabs as a people. The present Rashīd sees himself as a member of the human race, not as an Arab.

The implied author subversively challenges the use of the Palestinian struggle to serve other political agendas. Firstly, he implies that it Islamises what some believe to be a secular struggle between a colonised people and their coloniser. He does this by questioning why he had to be given a Muslim name to protect himself from being persecuted while fighting for the rights of Palestinians. During the Lebanese civil war, Rashīd sustains a neck injury. This is symbolic as the Arabic idiom refers to guilt being carried on the neck, making him instantly a victim whose neck has been injured and a perpetrator who carries guilt on his neck. On this topic, he refers to the Palestinian crisis he had fought for in his youth: "I suffer twice when the victim becomes the executioner. Why is the victim always an executioner, Mr Kawabata?" (215). This question is repeated in the novel, but its appearance in reference to Palestine can be interpreted as suggesting that those fighting for the freedom of Palestinians have become guilty criminals, an implication that is heretical to one that had previously fought for that very cause. Al-Ḍaᶜīf is not only *re*nouncing one of Arab nationalism's most important principles - the freedom of Palestine from occupation - but also denouncing it as a fight that is being enacted by guilty people. The motif of the victims of past atrocities turning into criminals is also maximised in al-Razzāz.

In her autobiographical novel, Raḍwā ᶜĀshūr' narrates her suffering as an Egyptian woman whose nation does not acknowledge her. Married to a Jordanian of Palestinian origins, she experiences bureaucratic hurdles when she gives birth because, as the government official says; "it doesn't matter one bit (that the mother is Egyptian). She might as well be English or Israeli. What matters is the nationality of the father" (ᶜĀshūr', 1999: 124). ᶜĀshūr' gives

precise, monotonous details of the paperwork required because of her son's Palestinian father emphasising that it is possible to be alienated at home, in one's own nation. Appropriately, her son at the age of 17 is filed under the category "immigrant" or overseas student when applying for college although he was born and raised in Egypt, by an Egyptian mother until that day. Unable to prevent the authorities from deporting her husband, she travels all over the world with her son to be able to meet him. Home, constituting the conjugal family, becomes an itinerary rather than a nation. The most intimate and pleasant family scenes are narrated in Budapest rather than Egypt or Jordan.

ᶜĀshūr' purposefully constructs her autobiography as an intertextual weave of references and allusions to her previous novels and her interviews as a novelist. She focuses on the repetitive speech genres and codes of Arab nationalism: the loss of Muslim Spain, the occupied territories of Palestine, etc. She uses this autobiography as a hidden apology to a reporter who had once asked her if she had written about the loss of Spain with the loss of Palestine in mind. She had retorted with the politically correct response that "I have not resigned myself to the loss of Palestine" (ᶜĀshūr', 1999: 179). But in *'Aṭyāf*, ᶜĀshūr' describes her complicated life as a defeated middle aged leftist Professor who could no longer "separate the fear of future defeats from the awareness of the previous ones"; hence, confirming the suspicions of the reporter. Such historically weighty events very clearly have no consequence on her personally. In the same paragraph in which she writes about future and past defeats she recalls "holding her sons' hands, walking down the aisle of the plane, sitting down, fastening their seatbelts….having lunch, buying chocolate" (182).

As mentioned above, ᶜĀshūr's autobiography is a conscious rewriting of the discourse on which *al-Bāb al-Maftūḥ* was based (al-Zayyāt, 1960). ᶜĀshūr' is an outspoken adherent of nationalist/socialist ideologies and an admirer of committed writing, but in this narrative the defeat of her ideas is crawling up on her as slowly and surely as her resignation to ageing. Raḍwā in the novel describes an incident when al-Zayyāt, the quintessential feminist, nationalist, socialist and committed writer remembers a comical moment when she is panic-stricken on not finding an outfit. Al-Zayyāt says; "I had a hysterical fit…not because Egypt or Palestine were lost, but because I couldn't find my

dress" (ᶜĀshūr', 1999: 194) al-Zayyāt's private property (and a very feminine item of clothing, no less) becomes more significant than intangible entities, even ones of enormous significance like her own nation and Palestine. ᶜĀshūr''s narrative unfolds into a story of ideologies failing to survive the violent blows of personal priorities and the humdrum details of everyday life. Yet the stubborn idealist Raḍwā, like Khālid in *Dhākirat al-Jasad*, the doctor in *'Iᶜtirāfāt Kātim Ṣawt* and al-Misīrī in *Zahr al-Laymūn* remains sensitive to every wound. They insist on prolonging the pain by describing its details to the fullest, as if by doing so their ideas will survive that much longer.

Their narrative voice is clearly sentimental. Rashīd in *ᶜAzīzī al-Sayyid Kawābātā* resorts to innuendo and satire to critique these ideas, perhaps because as a previous disciple of them he understands the weight they carry for some readers. For the narrator in al-Birrī's novel, on the other hand, the presuppositions of the reader have clearly changed: there seems to be an unspoken agreement with the reader that "the unity of the Arab peoples, the hatred of Israel and criticism of peace with Israel are tired, repetitive ideas that any intelligent person does not accord any seriousness" (al-Birrī, 2001: 22). This is accomplished by his skimming over them in the discussion of his intellectual development in such a cursory manner that is quite shocking if compared to their maximised importance for the other characters in this chapter. The narrative voice's nonchalant recitation of the what is portrayed as the tedious thought of uncritical minds confirms that the implied author of this work belongs to an entirely new generation with a different set of concerns, but one that has assimilated the rhetoric and the lessons learned from the previous generation of activists and has moved on to new ones.

The narrator of al-Birrī's novel endorses his membership to this new generation by mentioning how he dismissed Sartre as a writer impacting his reconversion from Islamic fundamentalism. Sartre was of great importance to the writers of *Iltizām.*[74] By mentioning his name briefly and then refusing to give his work the due diligence owed for his great influence on Arab writers, the narrator is alerting us to his rejection of engaged art and the Sixties generation as a whole. The event of rejecting Sartre is made even more significant by his

[74] See Jacquemond (2008).

apparent admiration for Ṭaha Ḥusayn, a liberal writer from an era preceding the influence of Sartre on the region. Nor can this be interpreted as a rejection of Western influence (also associated with the previous nationalistic generation) because Khālid is inspired by Rousseau's *Confessions* and John Stuart Mill, writers that also predate Sartre. The implied author shows that the young Khālid's choices are not a progressive intellectual's rejection of old influences and much read texts. Instead, they are choices endorsing his new liberal, individualistic world view and rejecting the ideas of the previous generation of Arab intellectuals in addition to his own previous Islamist ideology. One cannot miss the dual significance of the word *multazim* in his resignation to "never becoming a real committed believer" (al-Birrī, 2001: 168). A devout Muslim is referred to as a *multazim*, the same noun the previous generation of secularist Marxists and Nationalists used to refer to themselves and their writing. It is not surprising he rejects the two ideologies wholesale after his explanation of how he thought that they complemented each other.

Rashīd in al-Ḍaᶜīf also attacks *Iltizām* as a literary movement by narrating his own previous involvement in it. Rashīd presents Kawabata with a short piece he'd written on *Iltizām* art, which was the theory of art that the communist party endorsed. As I explain in the previous section, the present narrator sees his self in the past as an antagonising double. His tone is particularly satirical as he narrates his smugness about being the party's talented and demagogical writer. He had written that "those who repeat that art is the opposite of commitment…these people's stomach turns at the sight of blood" (al-Ḍaᶜīf, 1995: 13). The present narrator's sarcasm about these words written at the height of the civil war does not diminish their impact; his theory of committed art had amounted to a declaration of war.[75]

Raḍwā ᶜĀshūr''s self-reflexive attempt to rewrite *al-Bāb al-Maftūḥ* in the Nineties and her mention of all the previous generation's writers also amounts to a similar testament to the ending of the era of *Iltizām*. *Iltizām* as a literary movement had become a thing of history by the Nineties and the authors make it a point to clarify their awareness of this. ᶜĀshūr' accomplishes this through a tone of melancholic nostalgia for a previous time, al-Birrī by casual mention and

[75] See Seigneurie (2011) for a discussion of how the influence of committed literature amounted to an endorsement of violence in the Lebanese war novel.

rejection, and al-Ḍaᶜīf by vehement accusations of guilt. In other words, there is an overt polemic against a previous theory of literary writing. If one compares this with the selected novels in the Eighties (al-Dīb, al-Razzāz, Mustaghānimī), one finds that in the earlier novels two theories of art and literature apparently exist side-by-side, through a *hidden interior polemic* against committed writing (Kristeva, 1981: 73). Kristeva's description of hidden interior polemic brilliantly sums up the mechanism by which the values of the previous generation of writers are critiqued in these Eighties novels. In each of these novels, a character is writing a text: al-Misīrī is a poet, the doctor and Khālid are writing books. All of these texts within the frame stories are ones presumed to reflect the radical ideologies of their writers. Despite the implied authors' apparent sympathy for these attractive characters, they are revealing the weaknesses of these texts by showing the political failures of the characters. Hence, while the readers of that Eighties novel are imagining the content of that text within the novel, they hear the writer "who 'speaks' …[in] a foreign discourse [that] is constantly present in the speech it distorts. With this active kind of ambivalent word, the other's word is represented by the word of the narrator (or the character)" (Kristeva, 1981: 73). There is an ambivalent fictional text within the text we are reading: one that is earnestly written by the character but whose content is mediated to us by a critical implied author. The character's discourse is "othered", according to Kristeva, by the novelist's polemic. In the Eighties novels, therefore, we are presented with two sets of ideas about political life and about the function of art. The character presents the nationalist or socialist ideas of the previous generation while the author's oppositional ideas are hidden within them. According to Kristeva's categorisation, the Nineties novels present a straightforward *parody* of the previous generation, where the opposition between writer and character are manifest. Kristeva's definition would put Rajab's text within *Sharq al-Mutawassiṭ*, by comparison to the hypertexts, as *imitation*. Rajab's text is an imitation of Munīf's (or is imagined by the reader to literally be the same) as it is "taken seriously" by the implied author (Kristeva, 73). *Al-Bāb al-Maftūḥ* also takes Layla's ideas with the same seriousness. The hypertextual novels, on the contrary, use "stylizing effects [to] establish a distance with regards to the word" of the politically-active character (Kristeva, 73).

This hidden polemic aims to uncover the sectarianism veiled within the apparently secular ideologies of Arab nationalism. The secularist characters of the post-1967 novels are either guilty or victims of discrimination on religious grounds. In the prototypical novels, society is neatly divided into conventional or progressive, supporters of a certain oppressive state or opponents of it. As Seigneurie (2011) notes about the Lebanese novel, the previous generation of novelists understood the world according to a Cold War paradigm with all that entailed. The hypertexts in this thesis confirm Seigneurie's observation that novelists now present the world according to an ethnic-sectarian paradigm, except this also applies in novels outside Lebanon as well. This paradigm shift is crucial to a critique of nationalism: a unified nation is an ideal that forced homogeneity on multiple identities and loyalties. The construct of the home/nation that nationalism attempted to endorse crumbled on the two axes of economics and religion.

Examples are numerous and I will mention only al-Dīb and al-Ḍaᶜīf's implied critique of Nationalists' marginalisation of Christians. Al-Misīrī's apparent blind spot is his inability to see that his dream of a united nation of identical workers and students is not undermined merely by the hypocrisy of activists and rampant consumerism but by his own ignorance of the sectarian strife that it conceals. His marital home with Munā al-Māṣrī crumbled because of religious differences, but al-Misīrī fondly remembers her as "a Christian with a Muslim heart" (al-Dīb, 1980: 59). Rashīd in al-Ḍaᶜīf's novel grows to see how sectarian differences in Lebanon make his ideas unfeasible, and that by sweeping his religious difference under the rug for a higher cause he succumbed to an oppressive ideology and destroyed his family connections. Guilt overwhelms Rashīd's memories, giving his confessions a religious tone. The older Rashīd feels remorse over the festering animosity that had remained in his relationship to his father until the latter's death. Although his father abused him physically by ironing his fingers as a punishment for his atheism, Rashīd in turn forced his father into a cruel silence about his son's radical ideas. He regretfully remembers how his arrogance and adoption of communism made him mistreat his mother and other members of the Maronite community, but he is more pained because of his awareness of his complicity in the Lebanese civil war.

Rashīd, the atheist, finds himself compelled to be on the defensive regarding Christianity by the end of his novel. One of Rashīd's communist friends asked him to read the Qur'an's opening chapter, *al-Fātiḥa*, for him as he lay dying during the war, a moment that foreshadows Rashīd's own end. In the final moments before he dies he is asked for his name and his Christian identity catches up with him: "With us Arabs….your name can save you or destroy you" (al-Ḍaᶜīf, 1995: 157). He resents that his name can tell people who his family is and where he lives, so he refuses to say it. He dies knowing his father will be deeply ashamed that he did not have the courage or pride to admit his name because he was a Christian.

There is no such epiphany in al-Dīb's novel, perhaps owing to the less violent nature of sectarian issues in Egypt in 1982 when it was published and also because the main character belongs to the majority religion. The author leaves it to the reader to realise how al-Misīrī's dream of a homogenous nation could only be accomplished at the cost of a suppression of a sectarian crisis. Neither is the religious divide restricted to those between different religions in the novels. Al-Misīrī and his Islamist brother, and Khālid and Nāsir (also an Islamist) in *Dhākirat al-Jasad* are at opposing ends of the political spectrum but are capable of getting along; they have the common goal of opposing the oppressive and corrupt state. By the time we reach the Nineties novel, the gulf between secularists and Islamists widens (ᶜĀshūr', al-Ḍaᶜīf, al-Birrī). In al-Birrī, there are multiple antagonistic movements *within* Islamism. The issue of how secular authors present the narrative of secularism in the region is important toward an understanding of the rationale that brought about individualist views in their novels.

The authors' hidden polemic is clearer regarding the socialistic ideas of the characters. Al-Misīrī views his depressing surroundings as a manifestation of a nation ravaged by consumerism and capitalism. This character is incapable of accepting the present: he says he loved the town of Suez "before it was polluted by forced immigration, lies and broken dreams. He loved all the streets before they were devoured by filthy rats and new thieves," a symbolic representation of entrepreneurs and *Infitāḥ* (al-Dīb, 1980: 14). He often notes that he does not recognise the faces of bus drivers and waiters, as if he expects them to remain unchanged. I have already mentioned how this

character uncomfortably straddles two poles: he is a progressive radical who refuses to settle for a mainstream life and yet he is enamoured with tradition and conventionality. Al-Dīb's authorial judgement on this idealist is clearly that he is a confused man whose life "like an incomplete sentence" has culminated in nothing (13). Weber's (1996) definition of the double includes the image of the self as seen by an *other*, and al-Misīrī's image is presented to us by his Islamist brother who criticises him by pointing out his "moronic socialist dreams… these are palaces of paper, and you are deceiving yourself" (al-Dīb, 1980: 116). With this in mind, al-Misīrī's judgement of other characters is always coloured by al-Dīb's contradictory judgement. For example, as a Socialist committed to equality, al-Misīrī is disgusted with ex-political activists like himself profiting from their work, particularly those involved in creative productions who should adhere to *Iltizām* ethics. He thinks; "why don't they [meaning those who profit] stay away from the country, the people, meanings and fiction and poetry… *malhum wa māl al-balad, malhum wa māl al- nās* ('the country and its people are none of their business') …why don't they only speak about their money and their dollars?" (32-33). There is an obvious word play on '*malhum*', which connotes both money and concern or interest. Money, for al-Misīrī, is diametrically opposed to culture. Having money excludes you from those allowed to have an interest in culture. He cannot bear discussions where the well-to-do "still speak of the struggle of the working classes" (45). Whereas art and writing in the Seventies had become a repository for political expression under oppressive regimes, we see here that al-Misīrī resorts to art as an escape from political reality.[76]

A prominent secondary speech genre of the nationalist/socialist critique of *Infitāḥ* was its resulting conspicuous consumption of consumer goods (see Chapter One). Al-Misīrī and Khālid of *Dhākirat al-Jasad* embody this criticism, as they react negatively when other people show an interest in the standard consumer goods of the time such as the television. They are both disgusted when money or power enter into any equation (love or art). In Ibrāhīm's (1992) *Dhāt*, this motif of mindless, middle-class consumption of consumer goods is maximised. But whereas in Ibrahim's novel we are distanced from the main

[76] See Abi Samra (2001).

character Dhāt because of her comical obsession with consumption, in al-Dīb and Mustaghānimī's novels we are distanced from the protagonists for the opposite reason: their exaggerated contempt for the human pursuit of economic advancement. It is not that the implied authors are endorsing consumerism per se, but that their judgemental voice is loud in condemning the characters' hackneyed words about it. The reader finds it difficult to sympathise with al-Misīrī's misery because of the television sets in all the houses he sees, as he is not devoid of envy and he has not managed to embody a desirable alternative to other people's consumerist lifestyles. Khālid, on the other hand, judges other people's simple aspirations to live in modern houses because he (living in a Parisian artist's studio) is not in a position where he needs to worry about these things. Al-Misīrī's ex-wife, Munā al-Māṣrī, shares this hypocrisy. In al-Ḍaᶜīf's (1995) autobiographical novel, the elaborate description of his family's abject poverty makes the communist party's attack on him for his "bourgeois manners and coming from a family of landowners"; nothing short of preposterous (165).

Together with the implied authors polemic against a brand of socialism that is boiled down to clichéd ideas lies an impatience with undirected radicalism, al-Razzāz's (1986) portrayal of Yūsuf's pretentious bravery in prison is juxtaposed with the doctor's quiet humility in the same cell. Al-Ḍaᶜīf and al-Birrī's novels exaggerate this motif of meaningless rebellion. Al-Ḍaᶜīf implies that excessive, foolish bravery and self-sacrifice increased the violence in the civil war.

Al-Birrī's autobiography critiques the oppressiveness of the Egyptian regime toward political dissidents but its more vehement critique is of the ideology and operations of a group of political dissidents because it attempts to destroy individuality. This is a greater sin in the eyes of Khālid al-Birrī than the persecution of the police state. Challenging genre expectations, this author aims to defy what the implied reader already knows or expects about state persecution of radical activists. While the state's actions toward a teenage boy are definitely unacceptable, al-Birrī real condemnation is of the sheikhs who start using this incident to call it "an infidel regime" (111). *Al-Jamāᶜa* thrives on such conflicts:

> The revolutionary brothers…suffered from boredom...The radical Islamist movement would never be a missionary movement calling for adhering to religious rites. Its members,

> like the members of all revolutionary movements in the world thrive on the pride of overt resistance and conflict (118).

The present narrator mocks the theatrics of overt resistance. This extends to satirising the pride that surrounds being imprisoned or tortured. The younger Khālid regrets not experiencing painful torture in prison, feeling that he has to justify this to others. Torture and imprisonment bestow prestige on an activist as I have explained in Munīf's and al-Razzāz's novels above, but Khālid al-Birrī's narrative endeavours toward their demystification. When he does get a slight beating from a prison warden, it is very anticlimactic. So defying any reader expectation of state oppression as further radicalising an Islamist, al-Birrī leaves prison with a profound happiness to be free to pursue a normal life instead of resuming his militancy. Prison humanises him. He starts caring for younger prisoners. He realises as soon as he is released and he sees men and women talking and laughing on the street that he was cruel to want to kill them. He leaves the prison building running:

> I don't know if I am light or if I am running quickly…I can't describe how I felt at that time, as an Islamic Fundamentalist, that life is better than paradise, and that the soul of man hangs on the beak of the bird of freedom (al-Birrī. 2001: 224).

Instead of being further radicalised, as per genre expectation, Khālid finds purpose in the ordinary details of his life. This feeling of freedom is a complete transformation of the discourse on prison one finds in commitment writing. Munīf shows that Rajab's desire to live a normal life by betraying his cause and leaving prison are futile, as the oppressive state has made a prison of the whole country. Khālid in *al-Dunya 'Ajmal Min al-Janna*, on the other hand, is profoundly happy on release from prison to return to everyday life and be able to wear his own clothes again. It is a genuine happiness, and not one presented ambivalently by al-Birrī. This minimisation of the effect of state persecution on activists and, in al-Birrī's case the removal of other factors that instigate rebellion such as parental disapproval, begs the question of the purpose of radical political activism. In parodies, the purpose is mostly self-glory and lack of knowledge and vision.

In *'Aṭyāf*, a similar effect is accomplished by the incident of Shajar's confrontation with an Islamist Professor who deserts his beliefs in order to get ahead in his career and avoid persecution by the authorities. The Islamist tells

her “you chose to be beautiful and defeated. I thought about this for a long time and decided I didn’t want to be defeated or under surveillance!” Shajar had stood up for him previously, even though his belief systems as an Islamist directly opposed hers; however, the implied author shows her real bigotry when he abandons his beliefs altogether. The recurrent motif of the shortcomings of the old guard appears in this novel, written by an author who identifies with them. Shajar believes she is the moral authority but it is clear that the Raḍwā sees her as bigoted and her efforts to discredit the Islamist as petty. Again, the usefulness of Shajar’s political activism and ideas are questioned. They are questions raised repeatedly by the post-1967 novel.

By subtly portraying al-Misīrī as an envious (if harmless) character with contradictory ideas, al-Dīb invites us to question the very premises by which he judges others. Fatḥi Nūr wonders why he was imprisoned by Abdel Nasser although he supported him and his ideas. These are the same questions raised by the other hypertextual novels. In *ʻIʿtirāfāt Kātim Ṣawt,* it is clear that the generals that put the doctor under house arrest are members of his own political party, one that came to power through a revolution that the doctor endorsed (al-Razzāz, 1986). The doctor’s wife keeps repeating that their sacrifices would make sense if only it were the old regime that were imprisoning them. Khālid in *Dhākirat al-Jasad* bitterly rejects how he and other freedom fighters were sidelined by Algeria’s military and business men after the end of the French occupation.

> Back then, the warriors had their respect, and veterans were considered sacred. They evoked respect rather than pity. You were not required to offer a story or an explanation for your condition. You carried your memory on your body. Now, twenty-five years later you feel ashamed of your empty sleeve and you try to hide it timidly, you apologize to those with no past about yours. Your missing arm unsettles them, it ruins their mood, it makes them loose their appetite (Mustaghānimī, 1988: 73).

There is no doubt that these characters have legitimate concerns, but the implied authors seem to doubt whether there is a viable alternative to their grievances given their own shortcomings. This is why the reader finds it difficult to share Khālid’s extreme disapproval of Aḥlām’s choice of the army general as a husband. Despite Aḥlām’s (symbolic of the nation) attraction to radical men she ends up choosing a rich and powerful man for a husband; the nation may feel a romantic sentiment toward its heroes, but in practical matters it prefers

men who can perform other functions besides spark revolutions and wage wars. The nation prefers a man that conducts business deals and embarks on infrastructural projects. So within Khālid and Nāsir's complete rejection of Aḥlām's choice lies Mustaghānimī's hidden sympathy for it and a hidden interior polemic against theirs. Aḥlām's is a choice that the author understands, given the failures of Khālid. Rashīd sums up these failures in his realisation that the old guard of activists "were good at words, but not at the world" (al-Ḍaᶜīf, 1995: 13).

IV. Personal and/or political failures and narratives of development

In the previous section, I emphasised how the selected hypertextual novels narrated the failure of the ideologies embraced by a previous generation of activists and affiliated commitment literature. In this section, I return to relate this ideological failure to the personal failures of the individual that are characteristic of the modern Bildungsroman and autobiographical genres. I argue that the personal failures of the characters are used, paradoxically, as a victory for their own individualistic ethos. Gregory Castle (2006) has elaborated this at length with reference to the modernist Bildungsroman.

Castle (2006) shows how "dialectical harmony of inner culture and social responsibility" are in "the narrative logic of the Bildungsroman" (170). Only a close reading of each of the many post-1967 novels I have presented in this chapter including the prototypical *Sharq al-Mutawassiṭ* can adequately reflect the richness of the inner intellectual and emotional life of each of their characters. This is perhaps an inevitable shortcoming of a study that attempts to describe changing genre characteristics by analysing numerous novels. Confession as literary genre, with all of its self-analysis, self-doubt, self-assertion, guilt, failure and triumph appears in all of them. In many of them authors attempt to draw attention to fictional confessions to highlight the complicated internal struggles of the character. Forced confessions are a particularly strong motif. They can be found in *Sharq al-Mutawassiṭ*, *Ḥikāyat Zahra*, *ʻIᶜtirāfāt Kātim Ṣawt,*, *ᶜAzīzī al-Sayyid Kawābātā* and *al-Dunya ʻAjmal Min al-Janna*. They are portrayed as violent for several reasons but primarily because they attempt to sum up an immensely complicated character to a determined, and brief, message or role.

One interesting example is the incident when Rashīd's father uses an iron on his fingers because Rashīd refuses to read a letter for him (al-Ḍaᶜīf, 1995). If Rashīd reads this letter, it would reveal the secret that he can now leave school with sufficient education to find employment. His mother screams at his father asking if he will force Rashīd to read (she uses the Arabic word *"tuqri'uhū"*). These words have Islamic connotations: by forcing Rashīd to read this specific letter, Rashīd's father ensures his son will never have the opportunity to read anything else. The father's real fear is that too much education and reading will

endorse his son's atheistic ideas. Rashīd's inner life is the contested space here: his resistance to this forceful reading protects his right to "ask after the place of philosophizing, of reflectivity, in living", which is the underlying purpose of the classical Bildungsroman (Swales, 1991: 68).

Each character has that authentic trait, "the compelling 'thing' that one dies for out in the open…that 'thing' which cannot be exhausted in normative social relations, that nonidentity….[which is the] secret that the modernist Bildungsroman narrates" (Castle, 2006: 248). Despite their claims to uniqueness, as character types that "thing" is typically nonconformity and intellectual prowess or artistic talent as I have indicated above. In a paradoxical structure that scholars of the genre have repeatedly noticed, the precise "thing" that makes them who they are and produces the narrative at hand causes their failure. Symbolically, characters "die for" what they believe themselves to be. In a process of circular reasoning, their authentic characters are defined by their nonconformity. It follows that they are excluded from society. Their failures in society thus reinforce their self-definition as nonconformists.

This circular reasoning, hinted at in Moretti's (1987) definition of "the Bildungsroman compromise" or described by Castle as "generic failure" is a characteristic of the biographical genre. In other words, failure is a genre expectation. To simplify Moretti's (1987) *classification principle*, a nonconforming character who finally succumbs to social expectations fails to live by their own ideals. This model can be found in the life of the minor character Munā al-Māṣrī, who divorces the main character al-Misīrī because marrying a man from another religion had intolerable social consequences for her and she felt "they have no choice but to be pragmatic…she wants a home and children and here she can never have that. That is life" (al-Dīb, 1980: 79-80).

It is my contention that in the contemporary Arabic biographical novel, the specific type of failure reflected in the classification principle is not one for the main characters. The heroes of the hypertextual novels all suffer the opposite form of failure. They abide by their principles, only to end up with no social relations or responsibilities. I have mentioned how with the exception of Raḍwā in ᶜĀshūr''s (1999) biography, all the characters are single. Even Raḍwā's fictional double, Shajar, appears to be single as well. Marriage and family (and

their absence) have historically been instrumental to the Bildungsroman genre.[77] In the specific context of the biography of political activists, the absence of relationships with the opposite gender, families, friends and (in many cases) meaningful occupation is highly significant.

I mentioned above that in *Sharq al-Mutawassiṭ*, a prisoner urges men to castrate themselves to be able to endure prison. In that prototypical novel, male castration was more evidence of state torture. The image of the castrated prisoner was heroic: the foregoing of sex, love and family for a cause depicted their struggle as more difficult. In a later novel, *Dhākirat al-Jasad*, Khalid's amputated arm and his symbolic impotence in a relationship that is never consummated, are less heroic. In *Zahr al-Laymūn*, al-Misīrī's emasculation is depicted in other ways. He is humbled into accepting a mediocre public sector job, losing his wife, being unable (and unwilling) to finish building the house that his father had started for him. Al-Misīrī's *life* is never consummated, as the countless descriptions and symbols of his wasted potential demonstrate (al-Dīb, 1980). The recurrent motif in that novel of the image of the home/nation exemplifies the difference in the interpretation of failure in the hypertextual novels. Al-Misīrī house, inherited from his father, stands incomplete because the protagonist did not take heed of his father's advice to have the conventional future of regular employment and family. Al-Misīrī was unable to build on what was left behind by his predecessor because he devoted his life to activism. This is in stark contrast to his Islamist brother who developed his own half of the inheritance. The vacant, incomplete construct is symbolic of al-Misīrī's ideas about nation-building. In the prototypical novels, participation in a general, collective action develops personal, private life. In this hypertextual novel, the nurturing of each individual's private space is what would have developed the general, collective construct with each of the sons successfully focusing on their self-interest. Al-Misīrī's failure, then, is his devotion to what his brother disparagingly calls "moronic socialist dreams" (al-Dīb, 1980: 116).

This critique of the character's failure in private life is echoed in other novels. Zahra fails in all her romantic and social relationships (al-Shaykh, 1980). The anonymous double emasculates Rashīd by shaming the only woman he shows

[77] See Hardin (1991), Castle (2006), Moretti (1987).

a romantic interest in (al-Ḍaᶜīf, 1995). In al-Birrī's autobiography, the young protagonist's abstinence from sex is portrayed as unsustainable. The character's single state is not portrayed as reflecting their freedom from social norms *in the present.* In the process of narrating their life story, they describe that thematic youthful rebellion against social norms. Zahra is traumatised by relationships and marriage, Rashīd is ideologically opposed to the institution of marriage and family, al-Misīrī refuses to forget his romantic memories of his ex-wife. But instead of being proud of their decisions, they feel regret as they mature. Rashīd feels deceived: after parroting the double's polemic against marriage, the latter has decided to settle down. Rashīd, at the time of narration, has been excommunicated and is now dying alone. After spending his life fighting to resist family as an institution, Seigneurie (2011) notes how "Rashīd sees the grief his mother feels for him and contrasts it with another mother's indifference toward him" (70). Zahra hated marriage in the past, but before the moment of her death she was overjoyed by the sniper's deceptive marriage proposal. Al-Misīrī finds comfort only in Fatḥi Nūr's family home. Neither are there friends in any of these novels except *Zahr al-Laymūn*. Al-Birrī's autobiographical character, being only 21 when the narrative ends, seems to be gasping for a breath of freedom to do the socially normative actions such as going to University, having friends and sexual relationships.

The characters live in isolation, exiled by the choices they made in their youth. These descriptions of failure to have regular social relations are a reflection of their choice to be free or to follow their ideologies as Moretti's *transformation principle* implies. But again, the character's understanding of freedom is critiqued in the hypertextual novel either through hidden interior polemic (*Ḥikāyat Zahra, Zahr al-Laymūn, Dhakirat Jasad, Iᶜtirāfāt Kātim Ṣawt*) or parody (*ᶜAzīzī al-Sayyid Kawābātā* and *al-Dunya 'Ajmal Min al-Janna*).

In other words, the authors of the post-1967 novels seem to disagree with one of the prototypical novel's messages about a person's private life. I have mentioned that private life and the conjugal family have a greater significance in the individualistic world view.[78] Whereas al-Zayyāt (1960) and Munīf (1975) show in the prototypical novels that the character self-development is only

[78] See Dumont (1986) and Watt (1957).

completed in committed action in the sociopolitical field, the hypertextual novels show that the character's self-development is warped by the lack of completion of their private and family lives. Both models still conform to the Bildungsroman logic described by Castle (2006) of the desire for balance between inner life and social integration.

It is the definition of social integration that has drastically changed in the evolution of the genre. Ḥusayn tells Layla in *al-Bāb al-Maftūḥ* that her unity with the masses is more important than her union with him, and Rajab and 'Anīsa come to understand that having a regular private life is only possible after a people's uprising against state oppression (al-Zayyāt, 1960; Munīf, 1975). However, in all the hypertextual novels social responsibility and social integration can only be accomplished in the investment in private lives and family. It is an investment all the characters chose not to make in order to be committed to a general political cause and the implied authors' values appear to be that theirs was the socially *irresponsible* choice. It is a choice that contributed to their irrelevance on the social front.

This is very clear in the motif of tense parent-child relationships in the genre. In *al-Bāb al-Maftūḥ*, the implied author loudly disapproves of the parents' ideas about the conventional life they preferred for their daughter. The same sentiment can be found in Rajab's family's objections to his political activism. In all the hypertextual novels, on the other hand, the parents' words of warning about lack of family and regular employment in youth are endorsed by the implied author. Rashīd's guilt about his disregard for the advice of his mother, father and family friend Sadiq is a clear example of this trend. The evolution of the concept of self-cultivation from a collectivist point of view affiliated with nationalist/socialist discourse to an individualistic concept (stressing the importance of the family and social climbing) is evident.[79]

[79] Ibid

V. The evolution of the subgenre of the biography of the political activist

Seigneurie (2011) sums up what many of the contemporary novelists in this chapter are portraying; the “life of active commitment” was “opportunistic, nasty, and short” (36). Jacquemond (2008) also describes the life of the real circles of Egyptian creative writers, journalists, activists and intelligentsia in a similar way, claiming that only the most mature individuals exit that community at the appropriate time to make something of their life. Jacquemond’s account of their lifestyle demonstrates that literary bohemia described within them is an imitation of real life experienced by members of the progressive circles in the region. This critical discourse on radical Arab intelligentsia seems to have been preempted in Arabic fiction, as I have shown in this chapter.

I have surveyed how the hypertextual novels selected in this chapter narrate the process of disillusionment with the outcome of socialist and nationalist movement and parties. Frantz Fannon (2001) famously described that these ideologies were viewed as foreign by the masses whom the Arab elite felt it was their duty to educate. The more recent novels demonstrate a social consciousness in the form of what Seigneurie (2011) recognises as a humanistic championing of the self-dignity of man, or a “civil society of the mind” (38). Certain Lebanese writers “jettisoned programmatic Leftism by the late 1970s” and the new generation was in favour of personal freedoms, social justice and progress (Seigneurie, 2011: 39). It has been my objective in this chapter to show how Seigneurie’s thesis is relevant outside Lebanon as well. The hegemonic narratives of previously held ideologies, the shortcomings of commitment literature and the personal faults of the people who represented those ideas are all unravelled in many contemporary Arabic novels. The Lebanese civil war may have epitomised what was wrong with the previous intellectual paradigm but writers in other Arab countries were very much part of the critique.

Stephen Meyer (2001) notes that in the Nineties the desire to engage with politics that was “normally so fundamental to the Arabic novel [became] entirely missing... *A new note has crept into the Arab novel, expressive of withdrawal and abandonment*” (my italics, 216). The novels in this chapter were, in effect, fictionalising a trend that was occurring in literary and political life. I have not

attempted in this study to explore the disintegration of states, the political reasons for the end of Arab socialism and nationalism or the facts of state oppression in the history of the region post-1967. Instead, I have explored how novelists have used the biographical form to explore creatively the relationships between these external sociopolitical changes and the lives of individuals. I also demonstrate how the turn to a focus on the individual was considered vital to literary expression in the period of study.

One of the reasons for the turn, noted by Jacquemond (2008) and Kendall (2006), was that many of the Sixties generation gradually became part of the establishment and, hence, less radical. The subsequent critique of that generation was, in essence, an argument for the autonomy of literature (Jacquemond). The choice of the Bildungsroman or the autobiographical form then reflected their attempt to narrate their own story of maturity from rebellious politics. One of the most significant points I have clarified is that as the writers' consciousness of genre increased, their critiques became more emphatic and this resulted in genre transformation: from imitation of the speech genres of radical political discourse in prototypes, to a hidden polemic against it in the Eighties and thereafter to clear parody of it in the Nineties. By the Noughties, when al-Birrī's (2001) novel was published, the established genre and dominant theme now appear to be that of maturing from radicalism. Perhaps al-Birrī's own autobiographical account that ends with a youthful man aged only 21 is the result of this process of genre evolution. It is an indication that the new generation of writers have assimilated the literary forms of their predecessors at a young age and are about to introduce another major transformation to the genre.

Al-Birrī (2001) embraces explicitly individualism and liberalism in his work. If the other novelists I presented in this chapter do not openly endorse another labelled ideology, they certainly strive toward a humanistic emphasis on subjectivity and agency. James McDougall (2010) brushes aside the "conservative theory of autobiography", in which man evolves as fully conscious as one which cannot be argued for "with the same supreme (self-)confidence" and that literary scholarship should not limit itself to "*recogniz[ing] the individual as a rights-bearing subject of liberal sovereignty* and international law

(legitimate as this may be)" (my italics, 37-9). In his analysis of *Dhākirat al-Jasad*, he believes that:

> There is no doubt that a most immediate aspect of life as it is lived in contemporary Algeria has been, if anything, a surplus of the 'social' and the lack of space for individual self-expression…and *self-determination*. To say this is not to reproach a rich and complex society for not delivering idealized (Western?) standards of freedom…it is merely to state what many ordinary Algerians experience as a suffocation of their personal life in the everyday conditions of their social and political existence (38).

McDougall's analysis reflects the approach of many histories of the Arabic novel to read tangible social realities into fictional texts. It is an approach that raises several questions. I have elaborated on how implied authors felt threatened because of the previous generation's defeats and the advent of Islamism and sectarianism. Therefore, this explains why the "rights-bearing subject" is of great importance to the contemporary novel. Also, one must ask whether Mustaghānimī's (1988) novel is meant to be representative of life as it is lived by "ordinary Algerians". Khālid's long narrative is overflowing with self-analysis and diagnosis in the first-person. The emphasis on the interiority of the self-narrating character is one of the most consistent attributes of the genre post-1967. He is at no point "suffocated" in his personal life; he makes decisions about where to live, where to work and who to sleep with, with no apparent regard or even mention of the social conditions spoken of by McDougall in his reading. This may not be the case for the other characters in the novel or for ordinary Algerians in the real world, but Khālid (along with the other hypertextual protagonists in this chapter) has a self-consciousness and an agency *in spite of* whatever sociopolitical conditions exist outside the novelistic world. They are exceptional characters, largely because the magnified lens of biographical writing distorts the degree of freedom and agency that individuals have. That appears to be the implicit message the writers of many of these contemporary novels desire to convey. By using literary writing as social critique about "suffocating" external circumstances, it is possible to miss the very point these authors are making.

Mehrez (2002) may share with critics, like McDougall (2010) and Hafez (2001), the feeling that the something has been lost in the contemporary novel. She deplores that there is "nothing left to return to" after novelists have taken the personal turn, while McDougall (2010) claims that reading *Dhākirat al-Jasad*

as an autobiography is disappointing (48). Mehrez (2002) asks whether the young authors of the Nineties will “return to the family/nation icon” (48). I argue that writers such as Rashīd al-Ḍaᶜīf and Khālid al-Birrī would answer, thankfully, no.

In this chapter, I discussed the theme of political activism that mostly dealt with the socialist and nationalist ideologies associated with committed writing and the realist novel. In the next chapter, I will study another interext that was central to the pre-1967 novel: antagonism to the West. While the fictional biography of the activist was exemplar of the critique of the Old Left, the biography of the traveller was the most common form used to challenge the anti-Western legacy of the pre-1967 Arabic novel.

Chapter Five: Prototypical Travel Narratives and the Character Type of the Traveller

I. Travel as a literary convention

The clearest way in which to view the theme of the novels I study in this chapter, travel and migration, in relation to the previous ones concerning (primarily) leftist political activism is to view both in terms of Arab nationalism's dual emphasis on socio-economic equality and anti-imperialism. It has been my goal to show how the biographical form in the novel developed as a literary reaction to the social realism that was a legacy of the era of left-wing nationalism's ideological dominance. The life-story of the politically active character as a theme was used by many writers to narrate the decline, failure or disillusionment with socialism as applied in their nation or as an idea. In this chapter, I aim to show how the biography of the traveller or the migrant was used to critique the anti-imperialistic aspect of Arab nationalism that, prior to the period of study, had a profound effect on the development of the Arabic novel as a literary genre.

I have shown that in the process of telling the life-story of the ageing or maturing character, the memory of the period of political activism becomes remorseful. Actions in the past are narrated as having been motivated by self-interest, hubris and hypocrisy, rather than a genuine concern for public interest. Most significantly, the socialistic and progressive ideas of the protagonist are portrayed as an unconvincing justification for their personal and professional failures where others have easily thrived and prospered. These features of the novels' content seem to form an oppositional, individualistic discourse in a dialogic relation to collective and socialistic ideas. In this chapter, I will show how a similar discourse was employed by writers in response to a long-standing, anti-imperialistic cultural text.

In reading fictional biographies of political activism, it is difficult to avoid reading without referencing the actual historical events of lives of intellectuals and politically involved individuals in the region. When one reads about a character who is imprisoned, exiled, or silenced one has a mental list of the many intellectuals and political actors in the Arab world that have had the same fate, even in the event that the author of such a novels is not a victim of state

persecution. This is because the reader who approaches a novel with this theme has a preconceived notion of the author of the book she is reading: the author belongs to a community of intellectuals who share a group of ideas (progressive, Nationalist, etc) or at least is well aware of the relationship between creative writing in the Arabic-speaking countries and a set of political ideas and actions. This means a novel about a politically active individual is written and read within a convention of the already-read and lived texts of a group of people imagined to have a shared idea of the functions and purposes of literature. One can attempt to date the origins of this presupposition as deriving from a history of left-wing nationalism in the region, an endeavour that would lead back to an historical moment which predates the period that concerns this thesis.[80] However, the convention of writing a text with "alterist discourse" by narrating the life of an Arab traveller can be considered a literary tradition that dates centuries before the period of study (1967-2010).

From its origins in the early twentieth century, the Arabic novel used the theme of travel and movement to explore the dynamics of encounter with another. Examples of fictional and historical autobiographies in the modern era are vast and have been repeatedly studied.[81] Although both fictional and historical autobiographies presented intellectuals who embarked on an educational journey in the West, the latter tended to be success stories where the hero gains a cosmopolitan worldview and contributes positively to a nation-building project (Enderwitz, 1998). Until the late Sixties, the former veered more in the direction of failure on the personal and public spheres of an anti-hero's life and presented a social critique, as Stephan Guth (1998) noted.

Whereas travel writing is considered non-canonical in the Western tradition, it is central to the Arabic literary tradition (Smethurst and Keuhn, 2009). The *riḥla* (a text recounting the travels of a man, usually a scholar) as a genre developed to take on a great significance because of its associations with the spread of Islam, *ṭalab al ᶜilm*, (the quest for knowledge), spiritual maturity and community formation. Fathi Shihibi (2009) studies how the *riḥla* is a quest for identity, an "account of inner and outer journeys" and emphatically proclaims that it "constitute[s] the central genre in many of the modern Arabic literary

[80] See Isstaif (2000)
[81] See Badawi (1993), Allen (1995), Boullata (1976) and Newman (2002) for examples.

forms" (vii). The eyewitness accounts of the earliest *riḥlas* "effectively produc[ed] autobiographical material" (Ostle, 1998). As such, many of the canonical texts in the Arabic literary tradition become *simultaneously riḥla and sīra* (journey and biography), with the early modern texts placing particular significance on the quest for knowledge.

Shihibi (2009) describes the evolution of the *riḥla* from ᶜAntara and 'Imru'u 'l-Qays of pre-Islamic times, through to 'Ibn Baṭṭūṭa, 'Ibn Jubayr and 'Ibn Khaldūn in the era of Islamic cultural dissemination and dominance, and then to works of modern intellectuals – al-Ṭahṭawī, al-Shidyāq and al-Muwaylīhī, Ṭaha Ḥusayn and Yaḥya Ḥaqqī. He concludes his study with the more contemporary writers, Mahfouz and Nawāl al-Saᶜdawī. He includes both fictional and non-fictional narratives in his study. This chapter will pick up the rest of the trajectory of the *riḥla* that Shihibi describes, from Ṣaliḥ's 1966 classic, *Mawsim al-Ḥijra ilā 'l-Shamāl* (Season of Migration to the North), to more recent novels.

Franco Morretti's (1987) "compromise" is reminiscent of the trope Shihibi finds in the earliest *riḥlas* of 'Anatara and 'Imru'u 'l-Qays (9). Shihibi draws on the journey of Antara's to show how rebellion against society's discrimination against a slave produced a "legacy [of] the juxtaposition of mobility and conflict, to dramatize the contention between the individual and collective identities....he represents the sentiments of the social outcast as well as the social celebrity.....what we witness [is a] dissenting ideology" (11). Shihibi also shows how the tragic death of 'Imru'u 'l-Qays's father forces him back into his predestined social role after a life of wandering and philandering. Ultimately, these two biographies end in "group solidarity and a mutual recognition of group feeling," in a structure that is similar to the classical Bildungsroman.[82] Many *riḥlas* are famous for their itineraries through the Islamic *umma*. Travellers' encounters with others, particularly Christians and heathens, have been well documented.[83] Shihibi excepts the spiritual journey of 'Ibn Khaldūn from the genre as a whole. While 'Ibn Khaldūn epitomises the spirit of the traveller by gaining a perception of Muslim and non-Muslim identities and, hence, becomes a type of universal soul, the other narratives remain confined

[82] See Hardin (1991).
[83] See Dunn (1986) and Newman (2001) for examples.

intellectually within the familiar grounds of their own cultural and religious loyalties.

Daniel Newman (2001, 2002) discusses how cultural aspects of European society were seen as negative compared to travellers' own Islamic culture by studying travel writings from the early medieval period to early modernity. The pre-nineteenth century travellers, for example, expressed pride at converting others to Islam or humiliating people from other religions in debate. Aside from this, early travellers showed very little interest in understanding European culture. An interest in a comprehensive knowledge of Europe was only born among Muslims "when the infidel gained a foothold in Muslim territory" (Newman, 2002: 8). Any incidental facts gathered on 'others' were recycled back into the traveller's own narrative of Islamic hegemony. Dunn (1986) writes of Ibn Battuta's disdain of Christians that his *riḥla* "was, after all, a book about the triumphant expansion of Dār al-Islām [abode of Islam or countries where Muslims are dominant], not about civilizations still befogged in idolatry" (257). These observations confirm Smethurst and Kuehn's (2009) observation that travel writing has traditionally and universally narrated the desire for conquest.

The nineteenth-century travellers, like many characters in the early modern Arabic novel, went to Europe for education and had to adopt an apologetic, defensive tone regarding their traditions in comparison to European culture and lifestyle. Moreover, Newman (2002) notices in these travel accounts that the fascination with Europe became a bittersweet emotion of loss of influence and power, a feeling so prominent in the early Arabic novels. But still, the fascination and "love of all things French" produced a class of Arab intellectuals somewhat appreciative of Western culture (29). Fathi Shihibi (2009) also notes how intellectuals such as al-Ṭahṭawī and al-Shidyāq had a respect for European culture, politics and technological progress despite their pride in their own cultures. He suggests that these intellectuals were open to adapting and westernising their own societies as a means of treating social and economic problems. The openness of these intellectuals can be contrasted with the more recent legacy of independence movements in the last century: an overtly anti-Western discourse is evident in left-wing nationalist and Islamist ideology (see Chapter One).

Whereas some early moderns showed a cautious appreciation of Europe, the reconciliatory attitude seems to have somewhat diminished in Ḥaqqī's (1944) classic *Qindīl 'Umm Hāshim* (The Lamp of Umm hashim), where the sharp contrasts between East and West start being constructed in a complex fashion to make them increasingly distant and hostile. This almost simplistic dichotomous structure of Ḥaqqī's novella, positing West against East, Science against Religion/Superstition, Progress against Tradition, etc., persists in several other novels from the period. Shihibi, along with others such as Boullata (1976), Allen (1995) and al-Mousa (1993), have studied these dichotomies at length. Daniel Newman (2002) studies similar aspects of the early modern travel accounts in which "Europe is 'mythologized' and, more importantly, decontextualized, with the continent becoming a new, abstract and polarised construct, existing largely through binary opposition which served as filters within the transmission (and reception) of values and codes" (21). Newman refers to this tradition as constituting an 'alterist' literature; a term that refers to "works that are directly based on journeys or stays in Europe and which deal with one or more aspects of the new continent, *and the perception and responses to it by the traveller*" (my italics, 36). Consequently, the Arabic travel novel became informed by this alterist discourse.

The brief introduction to the convention of travel literature above can only hope to refer to the depth of the cultural reservoir from which presuppositions about this sub-genre can be drawn. This chapter discusses the evolution of additional layers in the alterist discourse of the Arabic travel novel in the post-1967 era. Intertextual approaches are distinguished by their ability to study how elements of various texts coalesce to constitute the ideas of a class of writers and even the general cultural wisdom of a certain period. With such a rich history, the theme of travel can be studied by acknowledging the assumed literary competence of readers and writers of the travel novel. This means the presupposition of the already-read texts about encounter leads us to explore how authors and readers demonstrate genre awareness. It opens up opportunities to study how resignification of existent codes within the genre indicate new meanings and new critiques of the previous discourses associated with it. In other words, the wealth of the convention makes tracing the transformation of the genre more rewarding. Every work entering a relationship

with the established convention of travel writing demonstrates an awareness of the entrenched ideology of the existent genre and uses the recurrent structures and motifs to change the message. It is this process that I will proceed to study below.

As with the previous two chapters, this will be simplified by comparing a work that exemplifies the literary convention, a canonical work or a hypotext, with various hypertexts. The first novel I introduce, Ṣaliḥ's (1966) classic *Mawsim al-Ḥijra ilā 'l-Shamāl* (Season of Migration to the North) has very little or no descriptions of Europe as a place and is based on the type of alterist discourse common in early modern travel writing (Newman, 2002). What little geographical descriptions exist in the hypotexts, of which *Mawsim al-Hijra* is a good example, are meant to symbolise and reflect the author/narrator's own ideas and perceptions of Europe. Regarding this aspect of the prevalent ideas in the existing "canonical" genre, I will attempt to show how in the post-1967 novels the characters pay attention to a realistic (rather than allegorical) geography. This will be one of the many indicators that shows a deterioration of the alterist discourse of the earlier novels as characters are not immediately concerned with the clash of civilisations that was often constructed in the hypotexts through sharp dichotomies along the lines of East and West. Often the characters consciously critique the very concept of this clash. At other times, it is the last thing with which they should be concerned in their difficult, mundane lives.

When Karl Morgenstern first coined the term Bildungsroman and attempted to describe the journey of self-cultivation he envisioned it as a physical journey as well as a metaphorical one. To have "masculine strength of character" was to combine knowledge of the sciences and arts with a penchant for business (cited in Hardin,1991: 10-11). This implied mobility, the privilege of travel and the capacity to blend into a cosmopolitan environment. Consequently, the classical Bildungsroman has been a genre that often uses the motif of travel. Travel makes self-development more possible. Smethurst and Keuhn (2009) study the existential nature of travel narratives, claiming that it is essentially "self-in-the world writing" that explores the "metaphorical possibilities of rambling, and undirected or circuitous motion" (4, 14). Travelling affords the modern subject the freedom from the restrictions of local social institutions. It

opens up horizons of cognition and reflexivity essential for self-construction, and reflects a restlessness, a "self-induced uprooting" that is a stamp of modern consciousness (Oakes, 2005). Even the earliest Arabic novels such as Haykal's (1914) *Zaynab* used the urban-rural movements of the protagonist to highlight questions of identity and portray how encounter with another constitutes subjectivity. Al-Ḥakīm's (1938) *ᶜUsfūr min al-Sharq* (A Bird from the East), 'Idrīs' (1965) *al-Ḥayy al-Lātīnī* (The Latin Quarter) and, to a lesser degree, Ḥusayn's (1953) *al-ʿAyyām* (The Days) because of its more overtly autobiographical nature are among the famous predecessors to the novels I will study in this chapter. What is clear is that Arabic literature shared with that of other cultures a tendency to conceive of travel as a way of construction of identity. Richard van Leeuwen's (1998) study of Arabic travel writing reaches the conclusion that "the relation between autobiographical texts and identity is even more obvious in the case of travelogues, or accounts of visits to 'foreign' people and places" (27).

The presuppositioned code regarding the relationship with the (Western) other presents a problem that post-1967 novelists attempt to address. Primarily, the main character's identification with her own nation, with its history, traditions and loyalties becomes more elusive in the early instances of the sub-genre. Both the homeland and the West evade concrete ideological and value-laden associations, and the main character herself refuses (or fails) to identify with either. Numerous sectarian, ideological and racial conflicts become so inherent in many geographical locations that the neat polarities that informed the earlier novels become naïve and unrealistic. The West becomes replaced with other destinations in Africa, Asia and Eastern Europe in an attempt to exit the literary tradition's excessive focus on London and Paris. In the busy, cosmopolitan lives described in the contemporary travel novel the characteristics of the protagonist emerge as emanating from a profound, inherent self that exists independently and *prior* to encounter. In place of the dramatic events that take place because of the unresolvable animosity between East and West in the hypotexts, such as *Qindīl ʿUmm Hāshim* and *Mawsim al-Ḥijra*, we find suffocating patterns of behaviour, repetitive personal history and a humdrum description of life in spite of physical movement and numerous changes of circumstances. These repetitions aside, the agency of characters in the

hypertexts is emphatic compared with subjects that were overly determined by symbolic requirements in older novels. I will elaborate on these transformations of genre as examples of the more individualistic, non-identitarian discourse that the contemporary novel adopts in response to nationalistic and collectivist ideas.

Although many of the characteristics of protagonists and structural patterns of the novels I will use will echo some of those in the previous chapters, there is one difference that manifests in the sub-genre of travel: sexual and gender politics are much more important to the latter. There are several reasons for this that I will elaborate below; however, primarily, the binary opposition between East and West in presupposed texts was often portrayed figuratively along gender lines, and the struggle for power between the conqueror and conquered imagined in the novel as sexual acts. Travel writing's convention of desire for conquest became more concrete as narrative of erotic desire.[84] Needless to say, contemporary Arab women writers have found ample material in this literary convention to take on in their novels. Ḥanān al-Shaykh (1980) inverts the Northern journey to Europe by travelling South from Lebanon, to an undetermined geographical terrain in Africa in *Ḥikāyat Zahra* (The Story of Zahra). Aḥlām Mustaghānimī's (1988) *Dhākirat al-Jasad* repeats, through her male character's voice, the patriarchal discourse on Europe typical of the existing genre while making her own implied, feministic voice well heard. Iraqi writer Batūl Khuḍayrī (1999) in *Kam Badat al-Sama'u Qarība* (How Close the Sky Seemed) offers an autobiographical narrative of a daughter of an Iraqi man and English woman, the offspring of the kind of encounter experienced in the older generation of novels. Iraqi 'Inᶜām Kachachī (2008) writes a fictional account of her autobiographical experience as an American soldier in Iraq in *al-Ḥafīda al-'Amrīkiyya* (The American Granddaughter). This novel's heroine is a second generation immigrant from Iraq and the narrative focuses entirely on the alienating journey of travelling to one's original homeland; it is also a narrative of a female invader. Mīrāl al-Ṭaḥāwī (2010) in *Brooklyn Heights* lives the anticlimactic dream of travel, mobility and freedom as a middle-aged mother.

[84] See Smethurst and Keuhn (2009).

But that is not to say that men have not produced their own critiques. Given the literary competence mentioned above of writers in this subgenre, even the prototypical novels I study in this chapter by Ṣaliḥ (1966) and, once again, Munīf (1975) reveal the beginnings of a different attitude to the other than can be found in what Newman (2002) describes in alterist literature.. Syrian Ḥanna Mīna (1983) in *al-Rabiᶜ wa 'l-Kharīf* (Spring and Autumn) maximises the motif of the possibilities of communist Europe as opposed to capitalist, Western Europe. Munīf's (1999) *Qiṣat Ḥubb Mājūsiyya* (An Obsessive Love Story) is a confessional novel that presents a protagonist who comes from an undetermined Arab country and travels to another undetermined European one; a character that is magically free from all the cultural baggage of his predecessors. Later novels critique and parody the elitist and machismatic assumptions of the existing genre. Iraqi Ṣamwa'īl Shamᶜūn (2005) autobiographical novel, *ᶜIraqī fī Parīs* (An Iraqi in Paris), tells the story of a Christian Assyrian man from an impoverished family who ends up homeless in Paris. al-Birrī's (2010) protagonist, in *Raqṣa Sharqiyya* (Oriental Dance) is a poor, underprivileged Egyptian man who attempts the goals of pragmatic Bildung by marrying a much older British woman only to become unemployed in London.[85] One of the most important characteristics of the later travel novel is that it focuses on the underprivileged travellers. This differentiates it from previous fictional and historical travel accounts where lower classes were ignored.[86]

In the introductory chapter to this dissertation, I mentioned how in the revisionist ethos of the post-1967 defeat, Arab left-wing nationalists began to question the reasons for the decline of their countries compared to other nations perceived to be more successful. These questions led to a period of self-criticism that manifested in an inward turn in the literary movement of *New Sensibility* (al-Kharrāṭ, 1993). It is this ethos that dominates the new discourse that evolves from the transformations of the established genre of the travel novel: one that turns the hostile, envious gaze away from the other(s) and

[85] The novels' first publication dates are cited in text to establish a chronology. Pages quoted may be from later editions and can be found in bibliography.

[86] See Oakes (2005) and Newman (2001, 2002).

toward the failing self. Journeys abroad, initially imagined to be escapes or explorations, turn out to be reassessments of personal responsibilities. The discourse in the contemporary novel reconfigures, or explodes, the given assumptions about the other inherent in nationalistic principles.

II. The prototypes: *Mawsim al-Ḥijra ilā ʻl-Shamāl* and *Sharq al-Mutawassiṭ*

I have explained that my choice of prototypes or canonical hypotexts is based on works that exemplify the structures, motifs and elements of discourse that came to be expected of the genre. They are works that best exemplify the literary trends, implied values and messages, intertextual relations at work within the genre in a specific historical period. I use the prototypes to shed light on the speech genres present in them that refer to the socio-political realm outside the novel. Texts are made up of "all the different discourses, ways of speaking and saying, institutionally sanctioned structures and systems which make up what we call culture" (Allen, 2006: 35-6). The prototypes I choose in this chapter are constituted of the "ways of speaking" about travelling, migrating and encounter in the Sixties and Seventies. They represent the culmination of the established literary tradition of travel writing that existed previously, in addition to developments introduced by their authors in response to the historical moment.

In these regards, al-Ṭayyib Ṣaliḥ's (1966) *Mawsim al-Ḥijra ilā ʻl-Shamāl* is a truly exceptional work. It is a complex text with many levels of meanings and significance that has, perhaps, established itself as a canonical work precisely because of the seamless manner in which it weaves together the fabric of the conventions of Arabic travel writing and alterist literature that comes before it. Strangely, it was also a work that was ahead of its time: demonstrating a heightened awareness of generic conventions and an ingenuity in transformative techniques it predicted and paved the way for many of the changes in the novels that followed it. It may be noted that the first publication of the novel dates only a year before the June 1967 defeat, a fact which indicates that the intellectual revisionist ethos associated with the period that followed cannot be boiled down to a singular historical event. Rather, fictional travel writing before the 1967 war invoked both the attraction to the West and the apologetic tone over loss of power and cultural dominance typical of nineteenth-century travel writing (Newman, 2002). This testifies to the wealth of the literary convention of Arabic travel writing that appears, in this novel, to have taken a life of its own ahead of sociopolitical reality.

The seductiveness of this novel's hero, Muṣṭafa Saʿīd, to the characters inside the novel and the readers is essential in conveying the novel's message about the desire for power. Muṣṭafa Saʿīd's exaggerated masculine traits and attractiveness to women symbolises a geopolitical struggle for power and territory. The character within the narrative draws attention to the implied author's awareness of writing within a convention where desire for conquest is a genre expectation. Desire for the (re)conquest of the West (culturally, militarily) functions as an already-read text in the Muṣṭafa Saʿīd's life events.

My argument in the following section will be that despite the allure of Muṣṭafa Saʿīd, al-Ṭayyib Ṣaliḥ meant for his novel to be a critique of this character and his principles. Mainly, Muṣṭafa Saʿīd's inability to see himself as anything other than a member of an oppressed people (Muslim, Black, Arab) constructs a character full of hate and vengefulness despite the romantic aura that surrounds him and the lyrical tone of the novel as a whole. The real hero of the novel is the narrator who develops throughout the narrative into a person capable of seeing the danger of Saʿīd's hunger for power, and instead understands the value of his non-identitarian self. This novel's anonymous narrator is the one who achieves Bildung. The narrative ends with a glimpse of a more humanistic world-view: the narrator places his private life before the power politics that was threatening to overwhelm him as it did his double, Saʿīd. This conclusion, which is reached in the very last lines of the novel, points to a new trend in the subgenre; it is a not only the critique of a false ideology that is preoccupied by power, but also of the ways such ideas take a toll on the private lives of individuals. Ideological critique is underscored by exaggerating the age-old theme of obsession with Western (or non-Muslim) women to a fanatical degree. The text points to a deeply-troubled masculinity as Saʿīd acts upon the ideas and biases of generations of Muslim travellers who looked upon Western women with shock, disapproval and misinterpretation of their social position.[87] Muṣṭafa Saʿīd's relationship with Western women can be considered an important code within this subgenre of the novel: the intelligent Arab migrant is attracted and attractive to foreign women. So vital to the definition of this subgenre, the contemporary novels I present below demonstrate an obvious

[87] See Daniel Newman (2002) for a more detailed discussion.

attempt at rewriting this code and introducing new significance to it. A close reading of *Mawsim al-Hijra* shows that it is an attack on the assumptions underlying the literary schema of the relationship between Arab men and Western women, but its critique is somewhat diminished by the romantic tone of the novel and the exotic aura that surrounds Muṣṭafa Saᶜīd's exaggerated masculinity and his incredible story. The result is a highly ambivalent text.

When compared with Ḥaqqī's (1944) *Qindīl 'Umm Hāshim,* this novel offers something more complex. It offers a social critique by engaging in subtle comparisons between "us and them," like Ḥaqqī's novella, in which the naïve protagonist travels to Europe for a degree in medicine to return home with an antagonistic attitude toward what he sees as the backwardness and traditions of his native homeland. While *Qindīl 'Umm Hāshim* advocates adaptation between cultures and gradual, reformative change in one's nation as the solution, *Mawsim al-Ḥijra's* message points to transformation of the individual self. In addition to the theme of East/West, North/South encounter, there is one about an encounter between the limited naive, conservative life and outlook of the narrator and the more adventurous and wild life of Muṣṭafa Saᶜīd. It is this encounter rather than the more obvious ones in the preceding novels that lead the narrator to question the validity of his assumptions about his hometown and its people, about the West and, moreover, about his own life and the role of his decisions.

The hypertexts I analyse below will offer alternatives to the subtext of travel as a liberating and sophisticating experience that the literary convention entailed. For example, Muṣṭafa Saᶜīd's confession begins by showing the narrator his passports. The narrator's unexplainable curiosity toward his double builds up a suspense that is resolved finally with a show of passports and visas, evidence of travel, immigration and citizenship. The narrator finds this breathtaking: Muṣṭafa Saᶜīd has been to many countries and is a British citizen. Travelling makes a person of value, literally worth a story.

It also makes this mystery essentially one about identity. Muṣṭafa Saᶜīd emerges as a *symbol of hybridity*, a literary foil to the narrator's sense of stable identity, of rootedness. Saᶜīd is the black Englishman and the cosmopolitan villager. In London his house is a quaint reproduction of everything oriental and exotic. In the Sudan, his hidden room is an English library. While the first

setting provides the stage for the theatrics of his seduction of women, the latter is private. Muṣṭafa Saᶜīd mimics his role as an oriental subject for the benefit of English liberals, but keeps the English part of his identity private and locked in the Sudan. He taunts the English by performing his role as a black man, a Muslim and an Arab, but is not prepared to play games in the village with his Englishness at all. Muṣṭafa Saᶜīd cannot conceive of himself outside of identity or think of his *selfhood as non-identity*, and that is his tragic flaw. He sees hybridity as a "lie", as a defeat of sorts (32). For him, to be hybrid is to be colonised and violated. Hybridity is a curse, "a contagious disease" that humanity caught, as he says, 1,000 years ago (35). Conversely, to be culturally pure is to be victorious.

Reflecting a nostalgia for the time of Arab/Muslim hegemony, the question of cultural purity and the insecurity of being influenced by a civilisation felt to be inferior to one's own is personified in Saᶜīd. The motif of the cultural purity of quaint, local, untravelled people (generally in a rural location) and the homeland's cultural homogeneity was very commonplace in hypotextual instances of the genre, including *Mawsim al-Ḥijra*. This motif will also be challenged by the post-1967 novel.

Muṣṭafa Saᶜīd's encounter with the village as a whole "... sets off seismic shocks... jolts people" and leaves the whole community transformed. By the end of the novel (Said, 1994, 64). We have in the narrator a character who is yelling for life after he had just been getting by in it, one who realises the value of a personal life that he had kept subverted (we know nothing about those few people that he wants to stay with or his obligations to them) and the pleasures of being alive, embodied in the hunger for a cigarette. While Muṣṭafa Saᶜīd's gloomy, circular narrative is overwhelmed by a death-wish, the narrator's ends with the compromise that is the stamp of the bildungsroman.[88] No, the world is not perfect, but the narrator still wants to live in it. The apparent contradiction between attempting to live one's life according to a set of principles and ideals on the one hand, and living it in the details of personal happiness is another motif common in the biographical genre, as we have seen in the last chapter.

[88] See Moretti (1987: 9).

The real migration that takes place in this novel is in the past, experienced as flashbacks in the form of a confession by Muṣṭafa Saʿīd, the narrator's alter ego. The narrative time accorded to *being back home* is very long compared to that of *being away*, which is substantially different from the classical *riḥla*. The *return* motif is vital to this subgenre as a whole and, prior to 1967, one can consider novels as attempting to open up questions about the complications of return and reintegration after emigration and the possibilities of existence after encounter. The minimisation of the idea of return is one of the major transformations of the genre that take place in the contemporary period.

Muṣṭafa Saʿīd exists less as a real person in this novel and more as a wish-fulfilment of the idea of Arab/Southern/Islamic hegemony: he represents a reversal of Orientalism. His confession resonates with the observation made by Daniel Newman (2002) on Arab travel accounts to Europe; they "are consistently absent from the equation as individuals…Europe is seen not as a world to be explored for personal gratification; rather, it exists primarily through its sciences and industries, just as the traveller exists through his native Muslim society" (23). For all his complexity, the character of Muṣṭafa Saʿīd is created by the author as a symbol of the alterist discourse Newman identifies. He recites poetry in English when drunk, speaks in English in his dreams, and his sexual impulses seem to be directed entirely towards European women. The West is romanticised and sexualised through this character. It is a place for seduction, lewd behaviour, and mysterious barbaric crimes. Even Ḥusna's crime is committed after she has been infected with her Westernised husband's germ of violence. This differs greatly from the hypertextual novels below which ground their travellers in very mundane details to make them more tangible and realistic. They experience issues that concern the 'everyday' immigrant or traveller rather than the nebulous ideological concerns of the hypotextual novels' intellectual traveller.

Northrop Frye (1957) would find strong elements of romance in this novel, where spontaneous desire sets the tone and the action, and where, "something nihilistic and untamable is likely to keep breaking out of [the] pages" (304-5). In al-Ṭayyib Ṣaliḥ's novel, nature and geography are heavy with symbolic meaning, and Muṣṭafa Saʿīd is constructed as an element of this natural geography rather than a well-rounded, human agent. His actions stem from

inescapable, natural, even biological drives. Ṣaliḥ utilises this allegory to emphasise the characters' spontaneity: "I don't know what spurred my curiosity", the narrator tells us on seeing Muṣṭafa Saʿīd, but it is the latter that will become the real icon of spontaneous desire in the novel (7). On the other hand, the reader knows what made him curious. He has, according to René Girard (2006), identified his mediator who becomes the focus of a novel where the desired object has been obliterated, or is incidental, in the form of Ḥusna.

Saʿīd's spontaneity endorses the imagery and language that invent him as a natural organism. Like many heroes of the classical Bildungroman and Watt's (1997) individualist heroes, Muṣṭafa Saʿīd was born "with the warm feeling of being free...As a young boy I felt that I was, well, different" (21-2). Freedom and lack of familial ties make him an ideal character type for a Bildungsroman. In this sense he is the opposite of the narrator. He is different because he is without constraint: "no being, no father or mother, ties me to a place" (22). He is a wanderer by instinct. One of the great ironies in this novel is Muṣṭafa Saʿīd's insistence, on the one hand, that his life is defined by choice and will and on the other, the persistence of that natural, uncontrollable symbolism that surrounds the character. Similarly, he insists on his individuality and uniqueness as a character, but is only able to conceive of himself as a member of an oppressed race. The way the character's story is narrated through this natural/geographical allegory necessitate that he is a character without agency, like the oppressed community of which he imagines he is part. Saʿīd thinks that he defines his individuality by choosing against the grain, but in his own private life he subsumes his personal desires into communal imagination. It is the ability of the narrator to recognise this flaw and understand that an individual cannot exist mostly as an element of nature or only as a member of a community at the expense of his own life that comprises, in my opinion, the resolution of this novel. This message is arrived at very late after an intense and cumbersome narrative. It is, however, a concept that goes without saying for the characters of the post-1967 novels.

Muṣṭafa Saʿīd's mind, a "sharp knife that cuts coldly and effectively" and a "strange machine," is the catalyst for his journey (24). Symbolically, it allies him *naturally* to the coldness associated with the North. This makes his British teachers send him Northward, to Cairo, on a scholarship as "the country

doesn't have enough room for [his] brain" (24). The geographical allegory in the novel is consolidated at this point. Muṣṭafa Saᶜīd's journey up North sharpens his mind toward a cold rationality, but the narrator's journey South near the end of the novel melts his brains and makes him hallucinate (98, 102-105). Al-Ṭayyib Ṣaliḥ succeeds in creating this ideologically laden geography to map out the mental processes of two characters who struggle with questions of identity and power(lessness) only to unravel it in his tragic conclusion. In doing so, he is using the binary opposition of the rational/scientific North versus the irrational/superstitious South that had been coded into the sub-genre's structure in the precedents to his novel. It will be noticeable that in the more contemporary novel this particular dichotomous structure has been minimised if not eliminated in importance.

While there are seldom any straightforward or overt ideological debates comparing Eastern and Western cultures in the novel in the manner of Ivan and Muḥsin in *ᶜUsfūr min al-Sharq* (al-Ḥakīm, 1938), they lurk dangerously beneath the surface of the narrative.[89] They finally erupt when the narrator enters Muṣṭafa Saᶜīd's forbidden library in the end of the novel to find Muṣṭafa Saᶜīd's English Quran and Bible and his publications on colonialism and the "economics of love". Aside from this, all discussions of matters ideological in this novel are presented as deceptive performance. Lawyers bring in theories to win their case in court turning it "into a clash of two worlds" (33). These words pre-empt intellectual and academic debates that preoccupied the region decades later, and frame debates about civilisational struggles as illusion and pretence.[90] The (imaginary) murder trial makes questions involved in these debates inevitable: Does Muṣṭafa Saᶜīd believe in his humanitarian economic theories? The prosecutor presents it as hypocrisy: how can Muṣṭafa Saᶜīd profess such theories while he treats women without any love or sense of equality? Is it hypocrisy that he resents power simply because he does not have it, except with women? It is important to mention that Saᶜīd's opinions on economic policies and political realities are never explained in detail, in a similar manner to the ideological tendencies of the activists in previous chapter.

[89] See Ouyang (2007) for more on the juxtaposition of East and West in the debates on the modernisation of Egypt within the work of this early modern writer.
[90] See, for example, Lewis (1982), Lewis (2001) and Ajami (1981)

It is *implied* through hints such as the “economic of love” and the “clash of two worlds” that Saᶜīd believes in economic policies that strive for equality and that he is opposed to Western hegemony on the political and cultural fronts. These fleeting hints can be filled in further by reader expectations that, as I explained before, an Arab intellectual in the 1960s such as Muṣṭafa Saᶜīd would have socialistic and nationalistic ideas or a postcolonial consciousness. It follows that the lawyer misses the point that Muṣṭafa Saᶜīd’s violation of women is the precise outcome of feeling violated and conceiving himself only as a subaltern subject. But the implied author of this novel shows how, even if we were to empathise with Saᶜīd’s sentiments and hear his influential arguments as the narrator initially did, we should ultimately look beyond the arguments and understand their limitations and dangers.

Ṣaliḥ accomplishes this by making the narrator become more critical of international politics and of his own townspeople when his obsessiveness with his double makes both of them indistinguishable in the narrative.[91] The more the narrator is influenced by Saᶜīd’s communal rhetoric, the more the borders of his individuality as a character are erased in a very tangible way. Just as Saᶜīd cannot conceive of himself as anything but a member of a defeated civilisation, the narrator begins to have difficulty distinguishing himself from Saᶜīd. And the less the individuality, it becomes obvious, the more potent the hate toward the other (the West, the coloniser) becomes. He becomes even more eloquent and lyrical than Muṣṭafa Saᶜīd in his war imagery.

> They made schools to teach us to say yes in their own language...They brought us the germ of great European violence that the world had never witnessed before...Yes, gentlemen, I come to you as a warrior in your own home (87).

One of the most recurrent motifs in travel fiction is the characters’ involvement in cultural production or at least the regular attendance of cultural events. This is a motif adopted by the post-1967 hypertexts in this chapter as well. In *Mawsim al-Ḥijra*, culture is the site of seduction and hypocrisy. Saᶜīd feels that participants in artistic and intellectual functions wear the gloves of sophistication and put on a show of “sly civility” while they are, in his eyes, infected with a disease a thousand years old, in this case, the hunger for cultural dominance (Bhabha, 1994). Ideological debates are portrayed as a

[91] See 110.

pastime for intellectuals who do not seem to feel the real implication of their words.[92] Such callousness ignites Muṣṭafa Saᶜīd's fury. He uses poetry reading events and seminars on religion and philosophy to commit "debauchery "(he uses the Arabic word *atafaḥash*, heavy with religious and moral overtones) (29-31). In one incident in London, Muṣṭafa Saᶜīd hears a speech on racism in the West Indies. Immediately, he describes his senses as being alert and his readiness to "hunt" for women. One can only guess what a speaker from the West Indies is saying about racism, but the resulting conversation between Saᶜīd and Isabella Seymour is preposterous.[93] In her eyes, he becomes "the desert's thirst, a labyrinth of Southern desires," and on learning of her Spanish ancestry, he immediately imagines being an Arab invading Spain (37). These fantasies are reminiscent of historical travel accounts, in which travellers embarked on "a mythical journey of *discovery* of a paradise lost, which also explains the fact that the few accounts that have come to us tend to bear on Spain, even though France received a greater number of Muslim diplomatic missions" (Newman, 2001: 40).

Al-Ṭayyib Ṣaliḥ again presents all descriptions of Muṣṭafa Saᶜīd's sexual exploitation of women by resorting to heavy natural figures and returning to that geographical allegory. Saᶜīd repeats that the city turns into a woman when he sleeps with one; his sexual conquest becomes a territorial one. From Saᶜīd's perspective, power and destruction are natural events, and he did not write the laws of nature. The conquests of Isabella Seymour and others are inevitable, not matters of choice. Muṣṭafa Saᶜīd denies all guilt:

> Yes my lady...until the meek inherit the Earth, and armies desert, and a sheep feeds next to a fox in the field, and a young boy plays ball in the river with a crocodile, until that day of love and happiness arrives, I will express myself in this twisted way. When I arrive at the mountain peak, breathless, and plant my flag into the ground, then I can relax and take a breath. That, my lady, is a pleasure greater than love, and greater than happiness. I have no evil intentions toward you, any more than the sea is evil when ships are destroyed on its rocks, or a storm is evil when it splits a tree into two (40).

The day for which he is truly waiting is the day when he and the cultural he represents, become dominant once again and "arrive at the mountain peak".

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[92] See, for example, the conversation between the narrator, Richard and Mansūr on 55-56.
[93] See 37-38.

Muṣṭafa Saᶜīd describes his emotions for his wife as love, and yet even in his description of intimacy he cannot stop employing his war metaphors, such as “I am the conqueror that comes forth from the South, I am the sailor and Jane Morris is the shore of destruction" (146). Consequently, for him the simple pleasures of a woman accepting his advances are "climactic moments that are worth [his] life”. In one of these scenes near the end of the novel, the strange metaphor of the icy Southern warrior finally unravels. In this sexual scene murder takes the place of intercourse. Having constructed his British wife as the embodiment of the haughty and unconquerable West, he finally achieves the crime that he has wanted to commit all along. When he is able to consummate his violent urges by murdering his wife, the language of the text changes to describe a state of heat which, within the allegory that the writer set up, is a more “natural” state for this southerner to be in. In this worldview, Man exists in a natural world where he has to fight for his territory and demonstrate his survival instinct.

The only way to exit this Darwinian narrative, the narrator ultimately learns, is to conceive of a new world where individuals have agency and their lives are not valued by their ability to defeat others. This conclusion is quite revolutionary for the Arabic novel of the time. While Ismāᶜīl of *Qindīl ‘Umm Hāshim* finds he has to assimilate into his native society and erase his Western encounter in order to be successful and merry after he returns, and many later Arab protagonists of the pre-1967 era were led to the conclusion that activism is the answer to all personal problems as in Ḥabībī’s (1974) *al-Mutashā’il* or *Pessoptimist,* the final words of this classic lead in the opposite direction: to dissolve oneself completely in the collective goal of a community is to fail as a wholesome individual.

Cold War politics seeped into the already established binary structure of the travel novel to divide the West into two: the Communist West represented by Eastern Europe and the Capitalist West represented, in particular, by London and Paris. Predictably, writers heavily influenced by the Socialist and pro-independence intellectual environment in the region found it easier to portray Eastern Europe in a very positive light. An existent speech genre associated with the post-independence era of the Fifties and Sixties tended to a view of Western Europe as the coloniser, and Russia and other Communist countries

as coming to the aid of the Nationalist movements in developing countries. A famous historical example concerns how Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser asked the USA and Britain for funds for the High Dam project, only to be rejected and compelled to turn to the Russians instead, who agreed. Such incidents translated into a positive portrayal of Eastern Europe in the contemporary novel. We have seen this in ᶜĀshūr's (1999) *ʻAṭyāf* in the last chapter where the exiled Egyptian family finds in Budapest the happiness they could not in their country of origin. Similar sentiment can be found in Hanna Mīna's (1983) novel, to be discussed in this chapter.

Sharq al-Mutawassiṭ clearly sets a precedent for the change in the portrayal of Europe in contrast to the horrors of living in Arab nations with oppressive states. In place of Europe as an imperial power that has conquered one's people and "brought us the germ of great European violence", the despotic Arab regime emerges as the power to be resisted. In contrast, Europe starts featuring as a benevolent force that can offer opportunities and freedom to immigrants and as a protector of human rights. Munīf avoids focusing the journey on the conventional destinations of Paris and London and chooses Greece, Marseilles and Genève (in addition to a brief trip to Paris). In doing so, the polarising technique of placing two cultural centres in opposition to each other is diminished. In hypotextual novels such as those mentioned above, the rural area in the Arab nation represents authentic culture and unadulterated traditional practices (the rural Sudanese village in *Mawsim al-Ḥijra*), while the capital of the Arab country already displays features of Westernisation and urbanisation (Muṣṭafa Saᶜīd, for example, stays with an English family in Cairo). On the other hand, the European destination symbolises a dominant and unified "other" culture. Contrarily, in Rajab's journey across several European destinations we glimpse a novelist's efforts to describe aspects of a shared humanity with peoples across the continent rather than create a location that symbolises the totality of another culture.

As I have mentioned previously, precise geographical description is not important in Munīf's novel. But while the vagueness of description in *Mawsim al-Hijra* is a vehicle for the creation of a symbolic space in which a hostile culture is located, in *Sharq al-Mutawassiṭ* the lack of geographical details and particularities universalises the novel's themes and helps the novelist achieve

his humanitarian message. The Arab states are a homogenous group that lie East of the Mediterranean. Rajab travels to Marseille for treatment from the injuries incurred in the prison of a despotic Arab regime. He meets doctors who are very sympathetic to his people's national struggles because they were also involved in their own country's liberation. A deep affinity exists between those he meets in the Western town and himself: they, like him, belong to the resistance against oppressive states and foreign occupation.[94] In Munīf's novel, Paris is a hopeful symbol of how civilised a place can become following a violent but liberating revolution. The Paris of "the noose and the guillotine" becomes a place where Rajab finds books published on every topic he can imagine (196). In the coming sections in this chapter I will show how the more contemporary novels eschew vague and figurative geographies for concrete descriptions of precise locations abroad in order to bring the focus of the narrative on the individual character (as opposed to generalised ideological themes) and also in order to emphasise the diversity of locations.

Whereas some hypotextual novels have naïve protagonists that are transformed by the Western encounter and cannot, subsequently, see the homeland and their own culture positively, this novel's protagonist's traumatic encounter happens in his own nation *prior* to his travels. Even before his Western encounter, Rajab views the entire Middle East as inhabited by "the remnants of humans....lynchers and victims...remnants of humans" (Munīf, 1975: 132). When he does arrive in Marseille, he is surprised that he sees "real humans" that attend the theatre and go shopping (187). Rajab's trip to Europe offers him a chance to recuperate and gather his thoughts, but it does not have any life-changing effect on him. His problems are at home and he must return home to face them. His personality does not develop due to an encounter with people from other cultures. Similarly, Muṣṭafa Saʿīd's characteristics are present from early childhood. Travel only allowed them to flourish. It is the narrator of *Mawsim al-Ḥijra* that experiences the transformation from encounter that had hitherto been the genre convention. I will elaborate more on this below in relation to the contemporary novelist's tendency to create characters with authentic and unchanging traits.

[94] See 192-207.

Before I proceed, it is important to note the stark difference between Ṣaliḥ's 1966 and Munīf's 1975 novels. The tendency to direct criticism and anger to oneself and one's nation in the latter novel is very obvious. Critique of the native society, especially regarding its backwardness, excessive traditionalism and superstitions and the desire for change and progress have been persistent themes in the Arabic novel since its early years, and are even more pronounced in the early novels that include international movement. It is an attribute of the genre of the travel novel that the character's movement, be it international or rural to urban, intensifies the critique of his or her nation's traditions. In the binary structure of hypotextual novels, the character expresses hostile emotions to both the other (for being more powerful, domineering, more advanced) and the self (for being on the losing side of the clash of civilisations, for being irrational, backward, etc). It is the encounter with the other through travel that plants hostility in a character who had been an earnest youth in his original home, which is a trope of the Bildungsroman genre in general. In *Sharq al-Mutawassiṭ* there is a genre development and that is the independence of self-criticism from outside influences. Rajab does not need to learn about the backwardness of his people "who have not even heard of such a thing as civilization" from his travels for he is already well aware of them at home (Munīf, 1975, 202). In Ṣaliḥ's novel, the main conflict is transcending the paradigm of hostility to a European 'other' and going beyond alterist discourse. In Munīf's novel, written only a few years after Ṣaliḥ's but soon after the June 1967 defeat, the alterist narrative is barely audible; instead, it is clear that there is a new paradigm of exclusive hostility toward one's own nation that is very characteristic of the Seventies.[95] This is a schema developed by subsequent novels.

[95] See Abu-Deeb (2000) and Abi Samra (2001), for example.

III. The traveller as fictional character type

In the previous sections, I have outlined a description of the assumed hypotexts of the pre-1967 Arabic travel novel. The basic scheme of these hypotexts was as follows: 1. A male protagonist travels to a Western country; 2. The character goes for the purpose of education; 3. The general themes of the novels deal in dichotomies that emphasise a clash of civilisations: East/West, Tradition/Progress; Urban/Rural, Rationality and Science/ Myth and Religion, Similarity/Difference, etc. 4. Due to his travels, the protagonist becomes torn between the two alternative cultures and has trouble identifying with both; 5. A relationship with a European woman (or more) adds to the protagonist's sense of angst and fills him with feelings of inferiority whilst alienating him from compatriot women; 6. The conflict ends either tragically or ironically; 7. A social critique (of the native society) ensues. Musawi (2009) sums up the characteristics of the novel of education in the first half of the twentieth century that

> First, there is a perceived need for Europe to be the master who is needed by the novice…second, there is a desire to have this documented in writing…[that becomes] part of the normalisation and codification process of the nation-state. These narratives portray each protagonist's pride in being apprenticed into European culture…third, a faith in this endeavour as the only viable way to bid farewell to the past (42).

To begin to describe the transformations that have occurred in this sub-genre in the post-1967 era, I will proceed to show the changes to the character type of the travelling protagonist.

A class difference seems to be the most prominent transformation. The main characters of the older generation of this type of novel managed to find a socially relevant and respectable role in their own societies, and to have relative success in the West owing to their being educated and intellectual men from societies with high rates of illiteracy. Muṣṭafa Saʿīd is successful in the Sudan and in the UK. The narrator is respected in his village and has a job in government (Ṣaliḥ, 1966). In *Qindīl 'Umm Hāshim* (1944), Ismāʿīl, the protagonist, trains as a medical doctor in Europe and returns to be a respectable physician in Egypt. Historical texts about the journeys of Arab scholars such as al-Ṭahṭawī and Ṭaha Ḥusayn can also be considered relevant prototypes. Rajab is a bilingual intellectual, an activist and a writer who can

afford to go to France for medical treatment (Munīf, 1975). Thus, the practical concerns of livelihood such as earning a living do not preoccupy them. This explains the luxury and, due to their more educated status, the intellectual inclination to ponder over philosophical ideas about empire, power and progress. It also explains the romantic style of writing that Homi Bhabha (1994) claims accompanies "the high ideals of colonial imagination". These male protagonists (as they tended to be in hypotexts) exhibit a desire for power either through an interest in the advancement of their nations or an attraction to European women. The desire for conquest, brilliantly personified in the character of Muṣṭafa Saʿīd, harkens back to presupposed travel narratives (historical or literary) of Arab travellers/warriors moving through an empire in which they were dominant or through foreign lands in which they would have been considered a force to be reckoned with. So, it is not so much that the prototypical hero wishes for his nation to progress but that he wants it to be more advanced, more powerful than the other culture he encounters. And it is not so much that he is truly attracted to a European woman, but that (as a "looser," more accessible woman) she embodies some of the characteristics of a culture he finds both fascinating and objectionable. Hypertextual Arabic novels have seized on the gendering of the cultural encounter and offered parodies and critiques of the obsession with the Western woman that has become a trait of the genre.

An important thing to note here is that mobility is associated with privilege in the convention of travel literature in various cultural contexts. Oakes (2005) shows that the experience of detachment "was a privilege of gender, and of class and empire." Edward Said (1994) contends that although an exile is "inconsolable" in his unhappiness, his "condition carries with it certain rewards and, yes, even privileges" (47, 59). Arabic travel writing before the twentieth century was produced largely by scholars or men on diplomatic missions.[96] Travel writers in pre-modern times tended to be of privileged status across various historical periods and empires: British, Islamic, Ottoman.[97] Smethurst and Keuhn (2009) note the disorderliness of writing by women, black and working class travellers. So to be from the other gender, class or from outside

[96] See Newman (2001) and (2002).
[97] Ibid and Smethurst and Keuhn (2009).

of empire was to produce a resisting and chaotic travel narrative. This is a common characteristic of the selected hypertexts. The narrative is non-linear, contradictory, consisting of flashbacks and episodes narrated by other characters. In *Brooklyn Heights*, everything happening in present day Brooklyn is congruous with events in a remote Egyptian village in the past. Hind's narrative is constantly interrupted by flashbacks that take her back to her place of origin (al-Ṭaḥāwī, 2010). In *Kam Badat al-Sama'u Qarība*, the personal confession of the anonymous female narrator is repeatedly interrupted by news broadcasting events of war in Iraq (Khuḍayrī, 1999). In *Ḥikāyat Zahra* the protagonist's words are intercepted by the confessions of a husband and uncle who dominate Zahra's story (al-Shaykh, 1980). In *Raqṣa Sharqiyya*, Ibrāhīm's long and cumbersome narrative is full of inconsistencies, supernatural episodes and shifts in narrative point of view (al-Birrī, 2010). This non-chronological and ambiguous structure confirms the character's exclusion from the most privileged classes.

The privileged protagonist features in hypertextual novels as *another* character, usually the envied double. This character becomes exoticised by the narrator to an unrealistic extent, a feature consolidated in the genre since *Mawsim al-Ḥijra*. I will elaborate further on this below. For now, I would like to point out the class differences in the hypertextual novels of this study. Hind in *Brooklyn Heights* cuts coupons out of newspapers in New York and is a cleaner in a doughnut shop. Those travelling to Europe (the characters in *Raqṣa Sharqiyya*, the protagonist of *Kam Badat al-Sama'u Qarība*, and Sam in *ᶜIraqī fī Parīs*) do so out of necessity and mostly find their underprivileged status at home replicated there. In *ᶜIraqī fī Parīs*, it even deteriorates, where Sam moves from a small one-bedroom flat in Iraq where an entire family sleeps to being homeless in Paris (Shamᶜūn, 2005). The documents Hind of *Brooklyn Heights* carries in her heavy backpack in Brooklyn indicate that travel is a bureaucratic ordeal for immigrants. Hind is not a free and unhinged wanderer like the male characters in hypotextual novels. She is a mother with a burdensome journey ahead of her; suitcases and a backpack containing "birth certificates, residency papers, degree certificates, vaccination certificates, references, bank certificates, a tenancy agreement for an apartment she hadn't seen" (al-Ṭaḥāwī; 7-8). When she socializes with other immigrants, the conversations

revolve around “cheap shops, job opportunities, places to get free food, welfare offices, cheap places to go out...their countries, visas, health insurance, social security” (23). The protagonist of Inᶜām Kachachī’s (2008) novel, Zayna, has to accept a potentially dangerous job in the American army to support herself and her brother. Like Sam in *ᶜIraqī fī Parīs*, Zayna, Hind and their immigrant friends have an American dream that is vague and turns out to be “a big lie” (al-Ṭaḥāwī, 2010: 183). Ibrāhīm of *Raqṣa Sharqiyya* is unofficially employed in Egypt and marries a much older British woman to support himself. The late novels of the Nineties and Noughties in particular seem to add increased emphasis on the underprivileged state of the main character.

Importantly, in hypotexts the already distinguished traveller embarked on a journey that enabled him to increase his privilege, and hence hypotexts demonstrate a structure of pragmatic Bildung. In the contemporary novels, migrants find their marginalised status in their nations duplicated or deteriorating abroad. This difference is particularly prominent in the newer generation of novelists, or those I have mentioned before as belonging more to the Nineties’ generation. So Hanna Mīna’s (1983) and Mustaghānimī’s (1988) novels still feature traditional heroes: the intellectual creative writer, Karam, and artist, Khālid (respectively), who enjoy relative prosperity or success abroad. That is because the latter, as I have discussed in previous chapter, is an Algerian novel that arrives late to Arabic fiction and the former is authored by an older, mature novelist who is very heavily influenced by commitment writing. The protagonist of *al-Rabiᶜ wa ‘l-Kharīf*, Karam, ultimately chooses to sell off his antiques, valuables and leave his job as a lecturer and radio presenter (which made him attractive to Hungarian women) in order to perform manual labour which he learns is more productive (Mīna, 1983). In other words, he abandons the features he had in common with the conventional fictional Arab traveller, such as Ṣaliḥ’s (1966) Muṣṭafa Saᶜīd and Ḥaqqī’s (1944) Ismāᶜīl, in order to be committed to a socialist cause.

Another related change appears to be the character’s ability to be fluent in another tongue. Whereas the superior intellect of prototypical characters allowed them to excel in foreign languages, the more contemporary traveller encounters a real language barrier. Muṣṭafa Saᶜīd’s ability to learn English fascinated his teachers and contributed to him leaving his rural town and

travelling North. He can recite English poetry when drunk, and significantly, use language to seduce English women. The anonymous narrator of Khuḍayrī's (1999) novel has to take English lessons. Although her mother is British, London never feels like home, and the English language – literally her mother tongue – never feels like hers. Karam's fluency in French does not spare him the feelings of alienation from his Hungarian speaking lovers and of longing for an obscure ideal of a compatriot woman that can understand his words (Mīna, 1983). Hind in *Brooklyn Heights* finds linguistic expression an additional obstacle to her desires to be an ultra-feminine icon. Al-Birrī's description of the language barrier's effect is particularly potent.

> Even in a city like London with people from every colour, I feel that silence is the only thing that can protect Ibrāhīm the son of Muḥammadayn from the hostility of others. Hostility? No, that's an exaggerated statement. What's the right word? Vigilance. Yes, vigilance. I fear that anyone that asks me a question will end up vigilant because I stutter when I answer. And on the rare occasion when the asker is a female I become a nervous wreck and I shiver and suffer a complete loss of memory. I remember everything but the English language. I remember what I am wearing, my height, my godawful features. I am good in bed, but I am bad at getting women into bed. They say we stare at women. Which of our other senses should we use? Should we smell, lick or fondle them instead? (al-Birrī, 2010: 425-6).

The impossibility of speaking a new language as if it were one's own and therefore the inability to mimic people from the other countries is a persistent theme in the contemporary novels and relates to a decline in nationalist sentiment (see below). It is important now to draw attention to how the loss of spoken language and privilege abroad indicates a lack of access to sex.

One of the most prominent features of the subgenre of the travel novel was the schema of the journey abroad as a means for sexual and romantic experience. In the genre of the classical Bildungsroman, travel was a means of gaining the worldly experience essential for the cultivation of a wholesome character and romantic relationships were an aspect of this experience.[98] Partly owing to the ultratraditional nature of the native society at the time the genre of the Arabic travel novel emerged, (1930s and 1940s in reference to al-Hakim and Ḥaqqī's prototypes), these relationships were better placed in the journey

[98] See Hardin (1991) and Castle (2006) on romantic relationships in the modernist Bildungsroman.

abroad. A relationship in the Western country was a step in the Bildung process of the naïve youth. This genre characteristic later took on increased proportions. So, unlike the characters in the previous chapter whose private romantic life played a minimal role in the narrative of political activism, those in travel novels are sexualised to a great degree.

One of the ways that the theme of sexuality was important in prototypical novels was that it was an indication that the naïve protagonist from an ultraconservative background had grown into a more mature, worldly man. Hypersexualising the white woman was also a necessary technique with which to objectify her and rationalise the animosity to the Occident/Other. Saʿīd turns Ann Hammond into "a whore in my bed" (Ṣaliḥ, 1966: 31). As she is the niece of a British MP, he implies that demeaning her is an attack on the state. The reader of *Mawsim al-Ḥijra ilā ʻl-Shamāl* is not given much opportunity to sympathise with Saʿīd's many white female victims. Their suicides are briefly skimmed over. Saʿīd's murder of his English wife is thrilling, exotic and justified after her humiliation and torture of him. What matters in the novel is *his* suffering, not theirs. Even while the reader firmly understands that Saʿīd is the criminal, it is impossible not to be fascinated with the character and forget about the white women in the novel. Their hypersexuality as white women makes them expendable for a higher cause (Arab/Muslim vengeance for European violence). Conversely, Saʿīd's hypsersexuality as a black, Muslim male makes him more attractive and memorable as a character. His taunt to white men, "yes, gentlemen, I come to you as a warrior in your own homes", demonstrates how he uses white women to violate white *men's* intimate spaces (Ṣaliḥ, 87). By humiliating the white woman, he emasculates and defeats the white male. Saʿīd, who wants to "liberate Africa with his penis", uses the sexual and the intimate as a vehicle to the political and the ideological (111). It is important to mention that the implied author's message is that Saʿīd's ideas and methods are deplorable, and that it is a "lie" that sleeping with or destroying white women can compensate the Orient for atrocities committed against it. However, the implied author's voice is subdued and his value judgement understated in comparison to the character's theatrics.

The exoticised white woman provides rich intertextual material for the contemporary Arabic novel. It is an intertext in the sense that not only is it

shared “between” many forms of travel writing, but also exists externally in many cultural productions; particularly cinema and theatre and in everyday speech genres. Attempts have been made by male and female writers to reinvent this intertext to convey new values. Munīf’s (1975) novel portrays emasculated male characters: they must refrain from thinking about women in prison to decrease their suffering, and Rajab is informed in Europe that he must abstain from sex because of his health. In place of masculine strength, Rajab the traveller is a symbol of human frailty and transience. His more recent confessional novel *Qiṣat Hubb Mājūsiyya* (An Obsessive Love Story, 1999) presents a story of an Arab doctoral student’s unreciprocated love for a Western woman.

Ḥanna Mīna (1983), who shares many common traits with commitment writers, attempts in his didactic novel to “educate” the Arab readers about Western women. The novel displays a consciousness of the already read texts about the Arab/Muslim man’s sexual experiences with a Western woman. Of Diā’, a shy, married and unattractive Turkish immigrant, the protagonist wishes “he could have known a woman in the West. I wish he had a girlfriend, so that he would have a complete experience” (Mīna, 1983; 223). During a discussion with a pimp, Karam learns that the Arab man is the best client to the prostitute because “he is more deprived, he would pay any price for a woman” (234). The implied author seems committed to the idea of changing attitudes toward the Western woman, and consequently, the attitude toward the West (especially the communist West). In the manner of the prototypical traveller, Karam attracts random Hungarian women without effort. Karam is unimpressed however, because he is a perfect gentleman and “a woman is wine, poetry, life…A woman is the measure of a man’s culture ….sophistication” (47). Karam and his lovers ritually enact all the stereotypical performances attributable to their literary precedents. He is a traveller with excellent tastes in art, interiors, liquors and food. They are women that are attracted to his intelligence, foreignness, generosity and chivalry. Karam’s flat in Budapest may be a literary allusion to Muṣṭafa Saᶜīd’s London bedroom:

> My bedroom was a cemetery overlooking the park. Carefully chosen rose curtains, warm Persian carpets, a welcoming bed with ostrich pillows…My bedroom reeked of sandalwood, my bathroom of pungent oriental perfumes, chemicals, oils, detergents, pills…Mirrors

> everywhere, so when I had sex with one woman it appeared that I was having sex with an entire harem all at once…My bedroom was an operating room in the hospital (Ṣaliḥ, 1966: 31).
>
> He transformed his house into an oriental museum, to fascinate and astonish his visitors. They study it, refusing to enter or sit before they take all its wonders in…it allowed him to live in a Far Eastern atmosphere (Mīna, 1983: 60).
>
> He uses his museum as a bait to catch women. A woman enters at her own peril. This unknown man that surrounds himself with mystery and spends generously (Mīna, 1983, 63).
>
> Your museum feels like a fishing net (Mīna, 193: 160).

A less privileged male character such as Ibrāhīm of *Raqṣa Sharqiyya* aims to repeat the famed sexual conquests of his literary predecessors but is portrayed by the implied author as nothing but a petty man guilty of sexual harassment. Al-Birrī presents Ibrāhīm's lust for the skin of a white woman in a highly sarcastic manner. The protagonist bluntly states that he prefers the skin of white women to that of dark women, even beautiful ones like the Lebanese Katya. He asks the reader to "put political correctness aside" and affirm that "white *is* civilization" (al-Birrī, 2010: 341). He offers his evidence of the superiority of the white race by revealing: "I lived with Margaret for three years and I never saw one gram of dirt even on the toilet seat...while everyone around me knows I'm in need of cleanliness" (341). The cleanliness of everything white, English and European is often repeated. For the narrator, whiteness is not a skin colour, but an attitude or way of life also connected to class and beauty. Margret, his older British wife, is not white, because she is undesirable.[99] Conversely, Yāsir, the upper-class Egyptian, *is* white; anything Yāsir does is acceptable (even when it is "low") because he, from Ibrāhīm's perspective, is sophisticated (119). Again, this novel parodies the exoticism of its predecessors by exaggerating their premises.

Interestingly, in the hypertextual novels by al-Birrī and Mīna, European women seduce Arab men through hackneyed images of the Orient, such as those deployed by Muṣṭafa Saᶜīd. Ibrāhīm sarcastically describes Margaret's efforts to set up his first sexual encounter by buying food, candles and oils as culminating "in a carnival of details right out of a thousand and one nights" (al-Birrī, 2010: 63). In *al-Rabiᶜ wa 'l-Kharīf*, Berushka is attracted to the idea of being Eastern. It enhances her submissive sexual and gender roles: "let me

[99] See 218.

imagine myself to be woman from a thousand and one nights, an oriental princess in a tale" (Mīna, 1983: 135). However, Berushka's efforts to mimic an exotic Oriental woman do not succeed in winning over Karam; her act emphasises only that she is *not* one. Unlike Muṣṭafa Saᶜīd who manipulates Ann Hammond's "longing for equatorial climates, burning suns, purple horizons," Karam refuses to be "vulgar" with Berushka (Ṣaliḥ, 1966: 31 and Mīna, 1983: 78). He is portrayed as a refined man who rises above the need to act disdainfully with women. In Khuḍayrī's (1999) novel, the English mother bitterly remembers the illusion that made her attracted to the Iraqi father:

> I thought the farms here were...oriental magic lying between a dreamy violet sunset and sunrise. I was a slave to their seductions. But what I actually got was the smothering heat, flies in the morning...even if I wanted to swim, the dirt in the river might poison my skin, and I might get raped by those people at any rate. Sunbathing is forbidden in these parts (29).

The mother's speech genres alternate between the extremes of orientalist discourse. There is another speech, however, "hidden" in the mother's and that is the individualistic discourse of the autobiographical author/narrator. The implied author suggests that the mother's attraction to the Iraqi man was short-lived because it originated from illusions and generalisations about a people, rather than from the peculiar traits of the beloved. Here, it would be useful to refer to Huggan's (2001) definition of the exotic as:

> A particular mode of aesthetic *perception*, one that renders people, objects and places strange even as it domesticates them, and which effectively manufactures otherness even as it claims to surrender to its immanent mystery…it may serve conflicting ideological interests, providing the rationale for projects of *rapprochement* and reconciliation, but legitimizing just as easily the need for plunder and violent conquest (13).

The authors of hypertextual novels represent an awareness, in contrast to the prototypes, of how this process of manufacturing of the aesthetic value of the "exotic" is practised by their own culture, as well as that of the other.

In the previous chapter, I outlined how as the biographical evolved, the post-1967 period exhibited a hidden interior polemic against the discourse of the previous era, followed by more direct parodies in the Nineties and Noughties. One can see this dynamic repeated clearly in this sub-genre of fictional travel biography as well. If we consider the relationship with European women as a motif, one can see that the Eighties' text is ambivalent. Munīf's Rajab cannot repeat physically a Muṣṭafa Saᶜīd type journey, nor does he need to, because

the Europe he encounters is kind and benevolent. Mīna's Karam will not stoop to the manipulation of women for sexual purposes. *He* is kind and benevolent to the Hungarian women that love him. In these novels there is a hidden polemic against the stereotypical Arab male's discourse about his own machismo (Munīf) and European women (Mīna). There is a conscious effort by the latter to dispel myths about the other by unveiling essentialist ideas on both sides (European women think Arab men are all polygamous, for example). Aḥlām Mustaghānimī's (1988) novel also features a polemic against Khālid's ideas about his French romantic interest, Katherine. Khālid cannot fall in love with Katherine's casual attitude to sex and her consumption of fast food. Like Mīna's Karam, he longs for the imagined authenticity of the Arab woman. Whereas Katherine is light and fleeting, Aḥlām is burdened, heavy, and permanent. In *al-Rabiᶜ wa 'l-Kharīf*, the reader is expected to be sympathetic to Karam's yearning for home as embodied in a compatriot woman and yet impressed by his respectful attitude to European women. In *Dhākirat al-Jasad*, the feminist writer implies that Khālid's inability to love his casual French girlfriend is a result of archaic patriarchal beliefs about the idealised behaviour and place of the Arab woman. In both these novels from the Eighties, there is a subtle discourse opposing the literary conventions of Arab male perceptions of European women and, in turn, Arab women. As Musawi (2003) notes:

> The Arab nationalist who equates the beloved or mother with the land assumes a sovereign monopoly of warfare discourse and the rhetoric of independence, which is predicated against the assumed powerlessness of women. The nationalist discourse, as the narratives of the 1990s demonstrate, is no less unitary than the religious and the colonialist (15).

Like many late-contemporary novels, *Raqṣa Sharqiyya* (2010) is much louder in its attack and uses overt parody to unravel the assumptions of the prevalent discourse about relationships with European women. Ibrāhīm is in no way attractive to women. His advances are rejected and felt by them (and the implied reader) to be forms of sexual harassment. In a clear allusion to *Mawsim al-Ḥijra*, he meets a Spanish woman, Bernadette, who is involved in humanitarian work in India and Iraq (an allusion, no doubt, to the Orientalist tendencies of Muṣṭafa Saᶜīd's lovers). Ibrāhīm's goals are the opposite of Muṣṭafa Saᶜīd's. Muṣṭafa Saᶜīd manipulates women sexually for what he

perceives as political gain. In *Raqṣa Sharqiyya*, Ibrāhīm and Ḥusayn endure women talking about politics merely to have sex with them. Whereas Muṣṭafa Saᶜīd devastates Isabella Seymour in the prototype, Ibrāhīm is chased out of Bernadette's London flat by a cat. While working as an informal tourist guide in Cairo his dreams of promotion were finding an old, "comfortable" (i.e. rich) European woman who would marry him (al-Birrī, 2010: 52). Ibrāhīm's ambition of seducing one of these "*niswān wāᶜa*" (roughly "desperate cougars") is not unique, for it seems to be a fantasy shared by all of his colleagues who prey on white women (al-Birrī, 2010: 6). Ibrāhīm's pathetic attempts at sexual conquest are met with disdain and are trivialised by Katya and others. When he apologises to Katya for extorting sex out of her, she replies on her way to the bathroom; "Ibrāhīm, never mind. Believe me, never mind...I'm going to take my pants and underwear down to take a piss, and I will pass something I loaded" (al-Birrī, 2010: 256). So, while Muṣṭafa Saᶜīd's ability to attract women was an example of male machismo, Ibrāhīm's interest in women demonstrates the exact opposite trait, for it reverses conventional gender roles with the male being the "golddigger". Khālid al-Birrī parodies *Mawsim al-Hijra* by writing "an epic of wounded masculinity" where female characters ignore, despise and answer back to any attempt to dominate them (ᶜAlī, 2010). In other instances, Ibrāhīm parodies the Arab hypermasculinity others expect of him to reach his selfish, low aims. For example, he pretends to be enraged when Margaret disobeys an order he had given her (as a "proper" Arab man would) and he enacts a comic rape scene to prove that he is "the man here" (210). But before the reader has an opportunity to be outraged at his humiliation of Margaret it becomes clear that his exaggerated manhood is a rather tongue in cheek portrayal of clichéd sex/power fantasies. Ibrāhīm realises the silliness of the whole matter: "She knows I am not violent. I wanted to give her a golden opportunity to experience the kind of scene she'd only see at the movies, that's all there was to it" (210). While Muṣṭafa Saᶜīd's sexual adventures were also a performance, they were for the noble purpose of "liberating Africa with his penis". For Ibrāhīm, it is simply for some money and citizenship papers.

Sam in Shamᶜūn's (2005) *ᶜIraqī fī Parīs* also gets involved with a Parisian woman just to find a place to sleep and eat. Al-Birrī's portrayal of the character's manipulation of women distances him from the reader and

purposefully makes him entirely unsympathetic. The implied value of *Raqṣa Sharqiyya* is that the female characters are entirely justified in their disdain for Ibrāhīm, whereas Jane Morris' condescension to her black husband in Ṣaliḥ's (1966) work invites the reader to relate events in the novel to colonial atrocities in Africa. Furthermore, in the late novel the animosity between the Egyptian male and the European women is not meant as a symbol of of geopolitics, as it is in the prototypical novel, but merely the simplistic vision of an ignorant and opportunistic character. The reader of *Mawsim al-Hijra* might react negatively to the manner in which Isabella Seymour exoticises Muṣṭafa Saᶜīd, but in *Raqṣa Sharqiyya* it is Ibrāhīm's exoticisation of the West that is under scrutiny. Al-Birrī's parody of the imagined hypermasculinity of the Arab male succeeds on two fronts. It unveils the racism and misogynism of the prototypical attraction to white women, and destroys the myth of the privilege of the male traveller.

Contemporary women writers have utilised the generic convention of sexual privilege gained through travel to reveal the patriarchal assumptions of alterist discourse. Ḥanān al-Shaykh (1980) brilliantly inverts Ṣaliḥ's prototype and its allegorical geography by letting her female protagonist travel south instead. Zahra wishes to gain power and control over her life by being co-opted into the privileged and racist expatriate Lebanese community in an unnamed African country. Her trip is a psychological one that takes her into her own heart of darkness. Africa is a symbolic territory where the oppressed can claim authority over others. Like Mājid, Zahra assumed travelling to Africa would grant her power that she lacked in her own country. The allegorical darkness of the continent provided her, in a "twisted logic", with a scheme that answers the problem of her non-virginity in Lebanon: "Africa was a deep well into which I threw my secret" (143-4). When she returns to Lebanon, her thoughts are clearer than ever, and the mental disintegration that happened in Africa cures itself. Although it is clear that the heroine manipulated her husband, she is treated by people in Beirut as his victim. Zahra pities Mājid: "Poor Mājid, his truth is lost" (143). Mājid's version of events stays in the pit of darkness while Zahra emerges victorious. This temporary success in preventing a violent confrontation with her family and escaping her marriage only contributes to her eventual, tragic failure to be empowered as an individual.

The implied authorial voice becomes loud in condemning Zahra. It is the darkness and disorder of the African realm that allows Zahra's own hypocrisy to go undetected. She seals the deceptive African episode with the question: "*How could I have thought for even one day that I would colonize Africa?...*I was never in Africa...The events there are far away, and all its characters are dead. They did not leave behind a single memory*"* (my italics, 155). In a reversal of Ṣaliḥ's geographical allegory, moving South enables. It grants the power of settlers to travellers, even disenfranchised women like Zahra. The horrors of Africa can then easily be brushed aside and denied by moving back to the realm of social order and civilisation (Lebanon). Zahra forgets them. But the experience of being a settler does not provide her with the self-knowledge necessary for self-cultivation. This literary transformation is repeated in 'In^{c}ām Kachachī's (2008) novel, *al-Ḥafīda al-'Amrīkiyya*. Ṣaliḥ's male warrior who conquers the North is replaced by Zayna, the female soldier who joins the American army in the invasion of Iraq. Zayna, an Iraqi-American Christian, falls in love with an Iraqi Islamist who does not respond to her advances. Although she goes to Iraq as an invader with the world's most powerful army, she finds herself sexually undesirable and freely willing to perform traditional gender roles in order to attract him. By mimicking the prototypical male traveller's opportunistic desire for conquest (of territory and of the opposite sex), Zahra and Zayna forgo many opportunities to achieve the self-awareness and development required of them by the Bildungsroman structure of the novels, and the implied feminist authors.

Khuḍayrī's (1999) protagonist shrugs off the cultural battles over her gender role as a young woman, and leaves us wondering what the point of her family's cultural clash was, as the narrator of *Mawsim al-Hijra* does in the end of that novel. The ease with which the Madam that leads the protagonist's ballet troupe succeeds in destroying the sense of modesty, chastity and propriety that her father worked so hard to give her seems surprising in the novel. The war awakens her as a sexual being (in a very similar manner to the heroine of *Ḥikāyat Zahra*). She is not at all worried about how the relationship between a Muslim girl and a Christian man may be perceived during the war. After meeting Salim a couple of times, she goes to his house with the intention of having sex with him with no feeling of fear or guilt, only "caution and curiosity"

(137). In a sexual episode similar to Zahra's orgasmic encounter with the rooftop sniper, her words are highly lyrical and pleasant, despite the image of her ultraconservative father also being on her mind. She touches the blood between her legs and gives it a name in the playful way she does with her father. But she is not concerned that he would have disapproved, and does not suffer from an obsessive fear about sex the way Zahra does. The cultural text of fear of premarital sex is present to the narrator, who shrugs it off by not "crying like they do on the Egyptian Friday night movie" (138). The cultural wars made so personal by her British mother and Iraqi father seem of no significance to the girl outside the family, again reinforcing the modern Arabic novel of selfhood's rejection of social and cultural constraints on the personal decisions of protagonists. The more contemporary novels explode the binary opposition of the West as sexually liberated (promiscuous) versus the native country and the self as ultraconservative (repressed). The Lebanese Katya in *Raqṣa Sharqiyya* and the Egyptian Lillette in *Brooklyn Height*s (see below) are Arab women; they enjoy sexual freedom and freedom of movement that Ḥusna in *Mawsim al-Hijra* could not have imagined, but it would be strange of us readers to see them as Westernised, particularly because their authentic traits originate in their native countries. When the awkward child narrator in Khuḍayrī's novel grows into a beautiful, liberated swan of sorts as an adult, we do not get the impression that she has decided to become more Westernised or that she has joined her English mother's side in the clash of civilisations that was her home.

Muṣṭafa Saᶜīd feels he achieves a full realisation of the power that comes with being a man in the West and Hind, in al-Ṭaḥāwī's novel, also associates travel and movement with the ability to enact a hyper-feminine role. She believes the freedom from those social constraints that were imposed in her own country will transform her into the perfect female she dreams of becoming, but her physical movement does not correlate with an intellectual or sexual liberation. While the older novels both idealised and objectified the Western woman for the benefit of the male character's personal journey, this novel constructs the whole geography of New York for the benefit of the female character's desired journey into idealised, liberated and sexualised femininity. Implicitly, the heroine imagines New York as the magical place where an Arab Muslim woman like herself can somehow get rid of the oppressive forces in her

patriarchal society. She is attracted to the characters of seductive heroines, but she only succeeds in imitating their sense of tragedy. She fantasises about being one of the glamorous, beautiful and romantic Egyptian actresses from the old movies, but she has neither the looks nor the personality for that. She has no sexual or romantic encounters in the USA. Her New York tango instructor teaches her "tango as a philosophy of a shared life", at which she fails miserably (al-Ṭaḥāwī, 2010: 106). Hind experiences her femininity as a burden to be regretted. The female body scares her; she says that as a middle-aged woman, she has spent her whole life afraid of facing it (93). For her, sex is a violent sacrifice and a traumatic event. Men desiring her are uninvited and malicious. This late novel offers a clear critique of the prototypical novel's (Idrīs, 1953 and Ṣaliḥ, 1966 are prominent examples) portrayal of the Western location as a space for what the implied reader might consider permissive sexual behaviour. Although Hind's narrative tone is one of melancholy and seriousness compared to the protagonist in al-Birrī's novel published in the same year, both novels are characterised by an awareness of the situational irony of an immigrant going to a Western city for romantic and sexual adventures.

Earlier, I mentioned that the attendance of cultural events and visits to sites of cultural heritage were a recurrent motif in the genre. Muṣṭafa Saᶜīd, the prototypical male traveller, felt that such events demonstrated the West's inclination to perceive of itself as culturally superior. He frequented them and, owing to his superior mental abilities, entrapped female attendees to satisfy an urge for vengeance. Muṣṭafa Saᶜīd's status as an intellectual, author and academic puts him in an advantageous position in these events. Hanna Mīna's (1983) Karam is also invited to give poetry readings and talks on Arabic literature by a Hungarian university where he unintentionally attracts female students. Mustaghānimī's (1988) Khālid, the painter, meets Aḥlām at an art exhibition in Paris. However, these characters lack the anger felt by Ṣaliḥ's hero during these events. Both feel privileged and grateful to be able to promote their work on an international scale and, consequently, they are genuine in their behaviour to women they meet. I reiterate that this reframing of a recurrent element of the genre indicates an effort to change the signification of the event. Whereas the prototypical novel, *Mawsim al-Ḥijra*, presented

cultural events and sites as spectacles of cultures vying for dominance, the novel of the Eighties reconfigures them as opportunities to build bridges (as Khālid's paintings symbolise) or correct cultural misconceptions (as Karam often finds himself doing). Alterist discourse is being transformed into multiculturalist discourse through the use of the same aspect of genre.

The novels of the Nineties and Noughties introduce a further transformation of this structural element of the sub-genre. The cultural site/event becomes evidence of the character's exclusion from a multicultural space, largely because of class. Al-Ṭaḥāwī's (2010) *Brooklyn Heights* and al-Birrī's (2010) *Raqṣa Sharqiyya* exemplify this:

> I used to be a teacher. I feel it's no longer sufficient, though. I feel embarrassed every time I have to speak English, even the words I learnt properly. Usually, I pronounce them in a way that others can't understand. I always go to gatherings of intellectuals, I claim to be one of them. I can't always understand what they are talking about. I sit in the back so no one asks me anything, and I don't find myself compelled to speak...I feel absent and ignorant more than any time in my life (al-Ṭaḥāwī, 2010: 20).
>
> I visited the church at the Piazza San Marco to kill some of the excruciating time…I dragged my feet to la Biennale di Venezia at the Arsenale like a disgruntled employee who goes to work just to clock in and out…I exchanged looks with a (Spanish) girl at the reception… I ask her if she wants to go for coffee…She has long hairs on her arm that I don't like, but a five minute encounter with her would give me a new record to boast about to my friends in London (al-Birrī, 2010: 475).

Hind and Ibrāhīm lack the knowledge and sophistication that would enable them to stand out at these events the way their literary predecessors did. They have the desire to imitate these prototypes, as I will elaborate in the section on the double below, but fail because they do not belong to the same class of traveller. Sam in *ᶜIraqī fī Parīs* (2005) also fails to produce the screenplay he felt he was destined to write, perhaps owing to the dire living situation he finds himself enduring in Paris. In Khuḍayrī's (1999) novel, the Iraqi narrator observes a peace protest about the war Britain waged against her country in Trafalgar square. When compared to the protest in Hyde Park in *Mawsim al-Ḥijra*, there is no sense of subaltern wrath against a colonial or imperial power. The narrator's tone is detached, observant and alienated by her immigrant status. The hypertextual novels' protagonists are immigrants who are disadvantaged in their country of origin due to poverty (or gender) and have no access to the culture of the Western metropolis because their status has not

changed. The reason they are ill at ease during seminars and talks (al-Ṭaḥāwī) or sightseeing and exhibitions (al-Birrī) is not that there is hostility to Western culture (Ṣaliḥ); rather, it is a reminder of their disenfranchisement, both at home and abroad.

In Ṣaliḥ's canonical novel, Muṣṭafa Saᶜīd is the embodiment of the *Iltizām* commitment ethic, even if the implied author's message is not. The novel presents Muṣṭafa Saᶜīd as an intellectual who is also an activist, although his ideas are nebulous and contradictory most of the time. With his books and lectures on colonialism and on the economics of love, and with his ridiculous plan to "liberate Africa with his penis," he is a terrorist of sorts, spreading violence and hatred. In fact, true perception and maturity in this novel for the narrator come when he refrains from the urge to burn down Muṣṭafa Saᶜīd's secret library in an effort to be rid of its alterist rhetoric. He decides that such radical symbolic acts, like his alter ego's sexual conquests and spousal murders, are useless. Muṣṭafa Saᶜīd's mistake was letting a general ideological problem dominate his bedroom and his marriage. The narrator discovers that he does not have to do the same. It is not really a "contagious disease"; he can choose to live differently. So already in this prototypical novel there is a critique of the architextual animosity to the Western other. However, as elaborated above, it is a very subtle, hidden critique on the part of the narrator and implied author.

The Eighties novels have a louder interior polemic against the traveller as a committed activist. I have already discussed Mustaghānimī's (1988) Khālid's commitment in the previous chapter. Hanna Mīna's (1983) Karam is a deeply committed Marxist who struggles throughout the narrative to remain focused on his cause and not get distracted by the women and the lifestyle in Hungary. Karam's dilemma is a personal one, deriving from his individual shortcomings as a philanderer who is given to drink and love of antiques, traits that are repeatedly described as "bohemian" (62, 145, 270). Hence, despite Mīna's commitment as a writer, his *character's* internal struggle in the novel is an individualistic one, in line with the interior turn of New Sensibility, rather than one associated with *Iltizām* literature. It is important to point out that unlike Rajab who struggles with Arab despotic regimes in Munīf (1975), and Muṣṭafa Saᶜīd who struggles with Western imperialism in Ṣaliḥ (1966), Karam's struggle

is with the self (Mīna, 1983). In ‘Inᶜām Kachachī’s (2008) novel, Zayna is a soldier in spite of herself, forced to join the military effort to “liberate Iraq” not out of conviction but out of self-preservation. In the prototypical novels, the protagonists were described by Ian Watt (1997) as “ideological monomaniacs” or fictional characters who created an idea by which to single-mindedly define themselves. Watt believes this is evidence of an individualistic ethos in the novel. What is clear is that the earlier writers used this “monomania” as a symbol of the ideology over which the character obsessed. In the Eighties novels in this section, personal factors and events prevent the characters from being too single-minded about their ideological or communal commitments (Karam and his bohemian lifestyle, Zahra’s attraction to the sniper and her pregnancy, Khālid’s unreciprocated love and alienation from developments in Algeria). In the later novels, particularly in the Noughties, it is clear that ideological or political preoccupations have disappeared altogether (Khuḍayrī, Shamᶜūn, al-Ṭaḥāwī, al-Birrī). This applies even to a novel that appears to have a political theme, such as Kachachī’s. I argue that this signifies increased individualism, as the single-minded idea that character’s now obsess over *is* the self.

This relates to another characteristic of the fictional character in the biographical travel novel. The main characters in prototypical novels were symbolic, whereas the characters in hypertextual novels are well-rounded. The characters of *Qindīl ‘Umm Hāshim* (1944), *ᶜUsfūr Min al-Sharq* (1938), *Mawsim al-Hijra* (1966) are mouthpieces for alterist discourse. The hero of Munīf’s (1975) novel represents a new discourse about the oppressiveness of Middle Eastern regimes. The later novels, however, present a new discourse focusing on the character as an immigrant rather than a traveller, and this reinforces themes of alienation common in biographical genres. There are several devices by which this is achieved, namely: the disappearance or minimisation of the “return” that was vital to the prototypical novel, the detailed description of the new destination and a focus on the mundane aspects of living in comparison to the vague symbolic geography of the hypotexts and finally, the change in the narrative tone of the characters.

In the next chapter, I will focus on two additional traits of the character type in the biography of the traveller: authenticity and agency. As in the previous

chapter on the political activist, I will demonstrate how the construction of the traveller as a person possessing an authentic self is an indication of abstract individualism in this subgenre. I will elaborate on the subsequent tension that individualism as an ideological framework provides the novel with: that of the self as both a given *and* an agent of self-development. I will show how the hypertextual novels have introduced subtle transformations to one of the necessary characteristics of the biographical genre.

Chapter Six: Spontaneous Desire and the Authentic Individual in Narratives of Travellers

I. Given traits in changing territories

Muṣṭafa Saʿīd is an ideal character to represent an example of Ian Watt's (1997) individualist heroes. Above I mentioned his lack of family and his spontaneous desire for travel and movement. Furthermore, his characteristics are portrayed as givens. This is a similarity he shares with Rajab (Munīf, 1975). Although Munīf's novel has many attributes of commitment, associated with socialism and nationalism, the description of the protagonist is in line with the beginnings of New Sensibility's interior turn. Rajab's convictions, beliefs, and struggles emerge as having existed prior to the narrative. This specific characteristic seems to be a biographical genre necessity. Attribution of personality traits to external factors is the realm of the social novel. Conversely, an exaggerated attention to a person's authentic, given and peculiar characteristics and a tendency to analyse them in detail in biographical rather than social terms defines the genres that concern this study. In this section, then, I will show how hypertextual novels continue this tradition in order to maintain the genre boundaries they shared with prototypes. I will show how the maintenance of the same element of literary structure allows authors to resignify the presuppositions of the hypotexts.

Hanna Mīna's (1983) Karam fits this description. He, like Muṣṭafa Saʿīd, stands out as an esteemed member in the community who is also a social outcast and an exile. There is no attempt to describe the events that led to Karam's exile from Syria, his adoption of Marxism, or his personality. But we do know he is distinguished even as he sits in a café

> Unlike the other customers, he ordered two espressos instead of one…Karam always went beyond the familiar, conventional…unintentionally. *He does it spontaneously*, he doesn't mean to astonish….he does what he feels like, what has to be done to assuage his anxious, searching, tumultuous spirit (my italics, Mīna, 1983, 18).

Watt (1997) describes individualist characters as having an allure because of an "excess" of individualism. It is this characteristic that the protagonists of the biographical genres repeatedly stress. They indulge in a belief that they are unique. At times this uniqueness is the cause of a confrontation between the individual and society: characters believe they are social outcasts, rebels,

dissidents. Zahra is unable to adopt a feminine persona, one that conforms in a satisfactory manner to the norms laid out by a patriarchal society. She often repeats (sometimes haughtily) that she is different from others, and her efforts to fit in are extremely awkward (al-Shaykh, 1980). Khālid is an outsider both in Paris and in Algiers; as a war veteran so obsessed with a long gone struggle for national liberation he seems to be an anachronism (Mustaghānimī, 1988). Khuḍayrī's (1999) binational anonymous narrator cannot identify with Iraqis or with the English, and when asked where she is from she answers "I'm not from here or there, that is the problem" (163). It appears that travel makes a good occupation for those who think of themselves as "excessively" individual, for it provides them with a mysterious aura that reflects the difficulties of pinning down or defining the self. Karam encounters this often in Hungary where women are curious about the enigmatic questions his journeys raise: "What invisible hand pushed him to the Far East, to Budapest and the MK café?" (Mīna, 1983: 82).

Al-Ṭaḥāwī's (2010) novel's main theme revolves around the protagonist's struggle to construct herself as a unique individual. Although she authored the poem *No One Resembles Me* she suffers in New York because she feels she resembles everyone. Everywhere she goes, she is disturbed by people thinking she is Jewish, Latin American or Indian. She attempts to avoid such questions: "I stay silent, and retreat into myself *denying my identity*" (my italics, 137). The poem in her backpack reflects her desire for a nonidentity, but in reality she can only construct herself by drawing on similarity with others. Combined with her extreme introversion, this contributes to her feeling that she is disappearing. When narrating events and stories in New York, Hind's voice disappears behind the mask of an omniscient narrator. It carries no overt opinions or judgements and becomes a register of observations. She narrates without participating, her biases and opinions nuanced and implied. Hind's subjectivity dissipates when she resigns to not having the capacity to differentiate herself from others.

A similar technique is adopted by Khuḍayrī (1999), where in the final stage of the novel the narrator's tone becomes uninvolved and observant. The language becomes increasingly descriptive and narration more objective. The narrator walks around London, taking mental notes and being vigilant. She is

attempting to understand and relate to the location more than the people she encounters. Once in Hammersmith, the narrator starts looking out from her window at London and Londoners with eyes that are distinctly foreign. She notices their clothes (something she never mentions in Iraq) and the signs and banners on the street. Something catches her eyes in signs that say “Welcome to Sunday prayers,” flyers about Aids, about “how to get rid of your pregnancy without pain” (obviously this is the narrator’s own rephrasing of the words on the flyer, since it’s unlikely that that’s what was written) (Khuḍayrī, 152). The narrator’s eye zooms on sex, race, consumerism and “strange” names. Her tone does not imply judgement, only estrangement. Her state of complete foreignness in London underscores the irreparable damage that has been done to her ability to identify with her mother’s culture in Iraq. More importantly, the apparent subversion of subjectivity reflects the negative consequences of the fight to belong to a collective entity on the authentic individual.

Hind constantly draws similarities between herself and her mother, and then between herself and her grandmother (al-Ṭaḥāwī, 2010). At one point, she thinks this must be because of their marriages to unfaithful men: “she looks like her mother now that she understood the meaning of jealousy, neglect and suspicion” (17). Finding similarities between herself and others does not stop at family members. She compares herself to Angel, a Coptic girl who was a school colleague, because she has become withdrawn and fat. She sees herself in the female refugees in the USA:

> They resemble her, or she has come to resemble them. They are fat like her, with heavy bottoms, they use a lot of hand gestures to answer simple questions, such as “how are you?”...they wear a lot of clothes, and weird clothes, like her, as if these clothes conceal their features and their existence. Weird clothes with ethnic patterns, triangles and squares, cheerful colours; red and green like the flags of extinct countries, drowned in some ocean (al-Ṭaḥāwī, 2010: 136).

Al-Ṭaḥāwī’s presentation of Hind’s position in her patriarchal society is similar to that of Khuḍayrī and al-Shaykh, as I discussed previously in this dissertation. It would be easy to explain Hind’s fear of the feminine (as reflected in her descriptions of her body, sex, motherhood) in the context of the highly patriarchal society in which she was raised. In other words, Hind’s troubled femininity could be read as social critique. She, however, was raised by a liberal father who let her finish a University education. She was a working

woman who chose her own husband even though her family disapproved of him. This is not a realist novel that presents events with a “deep-seated determinism” (al-Kharrāṭ, 1993: 38). The implied author presents a character with an inherent capability to exist differently.

For example, Hind was the first girl in the village to wear a more conservative veil than the traditional head scarf:

> She alone observed all night prayers, searching for the permissible and the prohibited, or – in reality – for what would make her something great, and through her God would change many things that she did not know....her new choices were supported by texts that she interpreted whichever way suited her, *to possess that consciousness that was contrary to other people*. She was busy, at the time, making herself ‘different’ (my italics, al-Ṭaḥāwī, 2010, 75).

In New York she tells a Bosnian woman; “I don’t know anything about that God you speak of. I am trying to forget him now” (136). These opposing points of view show a subject capable of changing and constructing herself differently from others.

This, compounded with how she married against her family’s wishes, and how she decided to travel without knowing what she was going to do in the USA constructs Hind as a woman with agency and not merely a product of sociopolitical forces. Like Zahra and Khuḍayrī’s anonymous autobiographical persona, she is confronted with external factors such as patriarchal values and poverty (or other class related obstacles) but the narratives do not present these as determinants of these women’s fate. This is the element that can be said to differ from prototypical novels. While the idea of the authentic self is sustained throughout the process of the evolution of the genre, the idea of the subject as a free agent emerges strongly in the hypertextual novel.

In the previous chapter, I discussed how Munīf’s (1975) classic *Sharq al-Mutawassiṭ* presented characters with no agency. All characters in that novel are swept into actions that might culminate in a revolution, a feature that reflected the implied writer’s radical political views. In Ṣaliḥ’s (1966) novel the two main characters represent two different discourses on man’s agency. Muṣṭafa Saᶜīd’s confession portrays a life lived as a natural element (see above). However, in the closing passage that comprises the narrator’s awakening, a discourse on free will as a reality, as opposed to Saᶜīd’s unconvincing statement that he is free, is introduced.

> And suddenly I felt *an overwhelming desire for a cigarette*. It wasn't merely a desire. It was a hunger, a thirst, it was a moment of awakening from a nightmare...My mind had become clear. My relationship with the river was defined. *I am floating on the surface of the water but I am not a part of it.* I thought if I die at this moment it would be as if I'd died the same way I came into the world*, without any will*. All my life I never chose and I never decided. I now decide that I choose life. *I will live because there are a few people I would love to stay with for as long as possible, and because I have obligations that I have to see to.* I don't care if life has a meaning or not. *If I cannot forgive then I will forget*, I will live through strength and through deception. *And I moved my legs and my arms with difficulty and force until my height was entirely above the water*. And with all the strength I had left in me I yelled, like a satirical actor on a stage: 'Help, Help.' (my italics, Ṣaliḥ, 1966: 151).

He finally realises that he can choose to "move" himself and not be pushed around by natural currents. The epiphany of the novel is that he is not part of geography or nature, not part of the water, he just happens to be in it. He is not an organism like Muṣṭafa Saʿīd. He can leave this geopolitical allegory through willpower. Ḥaqqī's (1944) novella, a clear intertext for Ṣaliḥ's novel, ended with Ismāʿīl's idealism about science and progress quashed by the weight of tradition and superstition. However, as I have mentioned before, Ṣaliḥ's ending may be theatrical and yet it comes very late in the novel for its message to be central to the novel's reading.

Conversely in *Raqṣa Sharqiyya* the impoverished immigrant from the deep south of Egypt is clearly constructed as having agency from the beginning of the novel (al-Birrī, 2010). His unchanging socioeconomic class makes Ibrāhīm feel inferior. But when compared to Muṣṭafa Saʿīd's feelings of inferiority about belonging to a marginalised race, the inferiority complex in this hypertextual novel is less deterministic. Ṣaliḥ's novel does not offer a resolution for this inferiority except to rise above it and focus on life's pleasures, because no individual can single-handedly rid the world of racism or change international politics. As for al-Birrī's character, he has the capability to cure his feelings of socioeconomic inferiority through real work and genuine relationships. It is Ibrāhīm's laziness, opportunism and deceptiveness that prevent him from changing his reality. In *ʿIraqī fī Parīs*, the implied author also presents the character as irresponsible and delusional when he refuses work in Paris in order to chase the dream of writing a successful Hollywood screenplay (Shamʿūn, 2005).

Muṣṭafa Saᶜīd is the quintessential “mimic man” who is Sudanese “in blood and colour but English in his tastes, in opinions, morals, and intellect” as a result of his travels and is therefore “emphatically [not] English” (Bhabha, 1994). I discussed above how his dichotomous identity was proudly flaunted in England and hidden in the Sudan, and therefore Muṣṭafa Saᶜīd’s mimicry does not disrupt the hegemony of what the narrator calls “the great European violence,” as Bhaba’s concept of mimicry does, but rather succumbs to it and retreats in search for that mirage of pure Sudanese identity. Muṣṭafa Saᶜīd’s sense of tragedy derives from his own hybridity, that he cannot be fully pure or the “same” as people in the Northern or Southern hemispheres. In *Raqṣa Sharqiyya* we are presented with a character who also desires purity and sameness, but instead of being tragic he is farcical. It is this imitated desire that makes Ibrāhīm, unlike Yāsir and Ḥusayn, the laughable confessional hero that he is. In *Raqṣa Sharqiyya*, mimicry is a choice. Katya, a Lebanese woman, tries hard to mimic an Egyptian dancer and Ibrāhīm attempts to mimic someone from another class or race (he even changes his upper Egyptian accent). In *Mawsim al-Ḥijra*, mimicry is involuntary. It spreads in England and in the Sudanese village like a plague.

This brings us to an important message about identity that has changed in the hypertextual novels. In Ṣaliḥ’s novel, as a representative of prototypical discourse, identity is an element of the authentic self. One is born into a community, race, or religion and one’s location and travels have a deterministic effect on the self. However, in the hypertextual novels, although the authentic self is still important, identity does not feature as an element of the self. Identity is always consciously performed and is not inherent. Hind’s introversion and mediocrity, Khālid’s romanticism, Ibrāhīm’s deceptiveness, Karam’s chivalry are presented by the authors as authentic, inherent traits. However, when Hind decides to wear or take off the veil, Khālid wants Aḥlām to wear a traditional bracelet, Zahra tries to be a normal wife, Ibrāhīm adopts the attitude of a stubborn Arab man as sexual role play and Karam learns more of Hungarian history and language, these are wilful acts. To act in a way that is perceived to belong to a cultural group or a larger collective, be it one’s native culture or a foreign one, is always presented as a wilful “unauthentic” act and mostly with ulterior motives. So Ibrāhīm, the poor, unemployed immigrant who cannot

speak English has more agency than Ṣaliḥ's hyper-masculine intellectual hero Muṣṭafa Saᶜīd. That Ibrāhīm chooses not to utilise this agency is his own character failing. The concept of identity as differing from authenticity is one I will explore below. For now it is important to reiterate how the contemporary biographical novel emphasises the existence of a nonidentitarian self compared to presupposed older texts for which communal identity was a constituent of the self. This is primarily why characters in hypotextual novels could be read as symbols of social or historical entities while it is increasingly difficult to read hypertextual novels in this manner without being too reductive. An interior polemic of varying degrees of clarity can be observed in these novels where the idea of the individual as representative of his or her culture is being renegotiated or resisted.

Notably absent from hypertextual novels is the idea of encounter with the other as transformative of self. Since cultural aspects of identity are put on, performed, then the individual authentic self resiliently survives changes in location and circumstances. In *Mawsim al-Ḥijra*, every character is transformed by encounter. This reinforces the alterist discourse that Muṣṭafa Saᶜīd embodies: Western military and cultural hegemony stand guilty of changing, infecting and corrupting the small Sudanese location so its inhabitants are profoundly changed. This dynamic is minimised or is absent from the hypertexts. Karam, in Mīna's novel, is fascinated by Hungary but the country only reinforces his already held beliefs. In fact, Karam rediscovers his true calling in Hungary, a place where he lives only temporarily. When he leaves his job and his hobbies to work as a builder, he is embarrassed by his dirty and coarse hands. His Hungarian lover reassures him "Don't be ashamed. *You are now the real Karam*. You left your pen, your museum, you went to work as a builder for the purpose of the dearest thing in existence" (my italics, Mīna, 1983: 327). I have already discussed above how Zahra does not change in the text, and how her narrative is characterised by the circularity of the confessional form. Any relief or awareness Zahra gains from her trip and marriage in Africa are very short lived (al-Shaykh, 1980). Ibrāhīm of *Raqṣa Sharqiyya* maintains his personality and narrative tone except for the short visit to Venice (al-Birrī, 2010: 206). Kachachī (2008), Shamᶜūn (2005) and Khuḍayrī's (1999)

protagonists also show no significant transformation because of travels or encounter.

Al-Ṭaḥāwī's (2010) novel focuses particularly on the suffocating effect of what she portrays as an inescapable authentic self. It is implied that Hind's move to the USA was motivated by a desire to escape the external factors that prevented her from becoming that ideal women she aspired to be. The confining patriarchal traditions of the village, her cheating husband, and her family's poverty make it difficult for Hind to pursue her ambitions (she imagines herself to be an actress from Egypt's golden age of cinema). So when, in New York, a Palestinian director gives her an opportunity to act in his short film project she is hopeful that it is a step towards self-actualization. She feels that she "possesses the capacity for longing and passion, but life did not give her an opportunity to express that enough" (al-Ṭaḥāwī, 2010, 206). But Ziyād casts her in the role of the heroine's mother, who is "oppressed and pathetic...She doesn't want that role, she doesn't desire to be anyone's mother" (206). She realises she is not desirable or beautiful with a deep voice like the main actress. She starts remembering, while she acts, the feelings of jealousy she had during her life toward her beautiful friends. Ziyād's decision to place her in the role of an immigrant mother leaves her desperate: "They didn't know that this is the role I have hated my whole life" (213). The change of her location did not change her role. This is the epiphany of the novel, when, walking on Brooklyn bridge, she realises "her life had not been a real one at all. It was all an adaptation from old movies. All the dresses she wore in her life were not the right size for her spirit" (213). Her spirit was unchangeable throughout her life, despite her efforts to dress it up or travel to locations associated with liberty and freedom. There is a "real life" and "real spirit" that do not change in dimensions.

It is the unchanging, authentic, "nonidentitarian self," the "excess" of selfhood that characters attempt to represent in creative and artistic ways in these novels (Castle, 2006 and Watt, 1997). Every character attempts to construct and reflect on that self in an artistic experience. Muṣṭafa Saᶜīd (Ṣaliḥ, 1966), Rajab (Munīf, 1975) Karam (Mīna, 1983), Zahra (al-Shaykh, 1980), Khālid (Mustaghānimī, 1988) Sam (Shamᶜūn, 2005), Hind (al-Ṭaḥāwī, 2010) all produce writings (novels, poems, diaries, screenplays), texts within the text. This is an artistic act which they feel they are peculiarly suited to because of the

idiosyncrasies of their authentic self. The anonymous narrator of Khuḍayrī's (1999) autobiographical work is a ballerina, Khālid in Mustaghānimī's novel is also a painter, Hind tries herself in acting. Ibrāhīm wants to be a photographer and a lover of art in Venice. This is a repeated motif in the biographical genres such as the Bildungsroman and confessional novels, and one that underscores the genres' individualistic discourse.

II. Doppelgängers and envy and in fictional travel biographies.

In Chapter Four I outlined a few of Weber's (1996) premises regarding the Doppelgänger in literature. According to Weber, the double results from seeing the self as another, the double is "an inveterate performer of identity," and s/he is an intertextual phenomenon resulting from repetition within a text or between one text and another (3). I explained how these criteria applied to the subgenre of political activism. Owing to the more various and numerous intertexts available within the convention of travel writing, the Doppelgängers in the novels in this chapter take on even more of Weber's features. I will summarise some of the remaining premises laid out by Weber and discuss how they relate to the texts at hand.

Weber shows how, through "double talk," the Doppelgänger confounds language and obstructs the ability of the self as an agent that uses speech freely (3). This is particularly important in the subgenre of the travel novel where the doubles tend to be more fluent in the foreign language(s) than the character. The Doppelgänger offers a:

> Challenge to received ideas of identity [through]…a *double bind* between cognitive and carnal knowledge…it subjects its host to an ambivalent sexual agency…[it is] power play between ego and *alter ego*…the *Doppelgänger* operates as a figure of displacement. It characteristically appears out of place, in order to displace its host…appearing at the wrong time; the time-warp of the carnival, with its suspension of social conventions, is its favoured scene…the *Doppelgänger* is typically the product of a broken home. It represents dysfunction in the family romance of structured well-being (Weber, 1996: 3-5)

Weber's account of the principles of the Doppelgänger in literature and Girard's (2006) theory of mediated desire both agree that the presence of the double (or "mediator" using Girard's term) undermines the autonomy of the subject. Weber believes this is accomplished because the doubling of the subject results in the "sharing," "halving" or "annulment" of subjectivity (5). For Girard, great works aim to unveil the dynamic by which characters copy the desires and ambitions of others and assume them for themselves. This process is characterised by envy, which is the emotion emphasised in the relationship between the subject and his or her double. In this manner, the literary work reveals that what a character believes is spontaneous desire is actually imitated.

As with other intertextual elements within evolving genres, the double as a literary construct has sustained some of its conventional features in hypertextual novels precisely to emphasise its difference from prototypical novels. I contend that in the contemporary novel, the double has maintained its ability to inspire bouts of envy in the protagonist, its coming from a broken home, its displacement. It also complicates the sexual and power politics in the novel; it still mystifies language and other cultural expressions, and it still gives exaggerated, self-conscious performances of identity. And yet, the double in the hypertextual novel is transformed into a device through which subjective autonomy and spontaneous desire are emphasised rather than undermined.

In Ṣaliḥ's (1966) novel, Muṣṭafa Saᶜīd is clearly the narrator's *alter ego*: the unconstrained character who is free to wander, commit violent crimes and engage in numerous sexual relations. The narrator on the other hand, is a pleasant family man with deep roots in his rural community. The narrative, predictably, blurs the speech of the two characters. Towards the end of the novel, the narrator adopts Muṣṭafa Saᶜīd's ideas, falls in love with his widow, and even sees Muṣṭafa Saᶜīd in his reflection in (Muṣṭafa Saᶜīd's) mirror. This is literary device associated with the Doppelgänger principle where:

> Figures or structures are reflected within each other…[this] is particularly applicable to the problem of recognizing identity…[it] at once serves to repeat and so affirm *ad infinitum* the identity for which they stand, and yet to cast the sign of identity into abysmal or groundless nonentity" (Weber, 1996: 6)

Weber's description accurately describes the challenge to selfhood the double poses to the character. Previously I elaborated on Rashid's double in al-Ḍaᶜīf's (1995) seminal novel. Ṣaliḥ and al-Ḍaᶜīf employ the same dynamic Weber describes above: the double is there to obfuscate the identity of the character. I am adding to Weber's description of this literary device that, in the context of the contemporary Arabic novel, the threat that the double poses to the subject is temporary; it is a necessary obstacle to overcome on the path of self-development. The biographical narrative invites the character to prevail over the anxiety caused by the double. Muṣṭafa Saᶜīd's subjectivity is lost in his adoption of the discourse of the oppressed Arab/African/Muslim peoples in every aspect of his existence. The narrator's authentic self and autonomy are also threatened by his obsession with and envy of Muṣṭafa Saᶜīd. In both al-

Ḍaᶜīf and Ṣaliḥ, the double serves the purpose of reminding the character of his authentic self. The difference is that al-Ḍaᶜīf's autobiographical narrator *begins* the novel having already gained self-knowledge and retroactively narrating his envy of the double, whereas in Ṣaliḥ's the narrator's self-realisation comes almost as a footnote. This reflects the different eras to which the two novels belong.

In the hypertextual novels in this study, the doubles still serve the purpose of giving more definition to the character through their difference from him or her. Importantly, the presence of doubles in the late novels emphasises the character's autonomy because they embody the different life choices and routes available to the character. In *al-Rabiᶜ wa 'l-Kharīf*, the purpose of the double is served by at least three immigrant types that, like Karam, were drawn to Hungary because of communism and yet differed from him fundamentally in other aspects: Ḥimich the Iraqi who makes profit out of smuggling banned goods into the country, Adamo the Italian who raises a family in leisure due to the fruits of socialism but doesn't work and Nelson, the Englishman who devotes himself to theoretical readings of Marxism while sunbathing in the garden (Mīna, 1983). The implied, committed author of this novel shows these actions as abusive to the principles of socialism. Their presence is a continuous warning to Karam that the lifestyle he enjoys in Hungary is also not reflective of his Marxist beliefs. At the other extreme hovers the memory of Nazim Hikmet the Turkish poet who, Karam believes, spent his time in Budapest without wavering from dedication to his Marxist cause.

The climax of the novel unravels, appropriately, in the defeat of June 1967. The event itself is traumatic, but Karam experiences it as even more so because of these character foils. In words that remind us of the committed author ᶜĀshūr (1999) in the previous chapter, Karam chastises himself because he was not sufficiently aware of the unfolding events in the Middle East.

> It was down to him, Karam al- Mujāhidī, to be up to date with the news more than others, because he was the intellectual that cared about reading literature. Such an important event should have caught his attention! But instead he was out all night at a club. It was his nature to indulge in feelings of guilt (Mīna, 1983: 307).

Although Karam perceives of his authentic self as that of a committed author, a revolutionary, he can now see himself as fading into a type of Marxist

exile similar to the three other characters. On learning of Israeli attack, Himich and Adamo (and many other immigrants) simply continue their day-to-day activites. Nelson is openly pro-Israeli, while the Hungarians (in another benevolent act) participate in massive pro-Palestinian demonstrations. The reactions to the traumatic event shock Karam into an awareness of what he was at risk of becoming, just as Muṣṭafa Saʿīd alerts the anonymous narrator of *Mawsim al-Hijra* to the dangers of indulging in fantasies of vengeance against the West. The others of Mīna's text force Karam to make the brave changes that his authentic self had been whispering all along. The reader may have seen Karam's identity as an exile repeated in his similarities with the other Marxist immigrants in the novel, but the author ultimately saves the subject from being "cast… into [an] abysmal or groundless nonentity" (Weber, 1996: 6). This novel's *heteroglossia* is evident through the speech of the others in a dialogic relationship with Karam: the doubles, the good protestors of Hungary, and the women he is involved in. It is a dialogic relationship that eventually leads to a better definition of self.[100]

This is a similar feature shared with Munīf's (1975) novel a decade earlier, where other characters such as 'Anīsa, Ḥāmid and Hādī initially offered different speeches and points of view to Rajab's. In Munīf's novel, however, all of these characters' initial differences are ultimately swept into the implied author's monologic revolutionary message. This is an important difference between the two novels, both by Marxist committed authors, both involving a trip to the West and persecution by an Arab state, written one decade apart. The former novel obliterates the autonomy and difference of its characters so that they fit into its narrative of inevitable revolution. Mīna's latter novel is fundamentally different; Karam's decisions are portrayed as conscious, difficult, individual choices that are emphatically not made by the other characters. Unlike the assumption of Munīf's novel that all the characters' small contributions would culminate in unified, mass action, Mīna's novel leaves the question of what the consequences of Karam's final decision to return to struggle in Syria would amount to, as an open one. In Mīna's novel, the political struggle matters much less that Karam's own maturity and his adherence to his

[100] See Bakhtin (1981).

spontaneous desires. In that sense, Mīna's novel clearly presents an individualistic discourse when juxtaposed with Munīf's collectivist call for action.

The anonymous narrator of *Mawsim al-Hijra* appears to have created his Doppelgänger to wage the wars and sleep with the women that he could not. In many ways this is an intertext to Mustaghānimī's (1988) Khālid's envy over his double Ziyād's virility as a healthy man engaged in the ongoing Palestinian struggle and his attractiveness to the desired object, Aḥlām. What both hosts share is their desire to continue struggles that had already been settled with them on the losing side. The Doppelgänger is the character invented as an enhanced image of the self and capable of regaining some of the dignity that went with lost causes. Yet, the envy felt for this more capable double results in even more feelings of inferiority and self-loathing. Mustaghānimī's novel ends with Khālid in the airport, leaving Algeria for Paris once and for all. Warriors without a war such as Muṣṭafa Saᶜīd and Khālid leave the narrative to be forgotten either through death or travel to the West.

Lost pan-Arab causes are notably absent in later novels' subject-mediator relationships. They also construct the Doppelgänger as intellectually and sexually superior. Alternatively, the double may represent a discourse on ideological or cultural purity, such as Khaduja the Iraqi child in Khuḍayrī's (1999) novel. The admiration/envy that arises can be ascribed to the other's ability to better represent ideological struggle and cultural identity (Muṣṭafa Saᶜīd, Hādī in Munīf, Nazim Hikmet in Mīna, Ziyād in Mustaghānimī). The conflict with the double is then resolved with a return of emphasis to the self.

In later novels the reason for the conflict with the double is transformed into class envy. For example, if one thinks of Ibrāhīm in *Raqṣa Sharqiyya* in Girard's (2006) terms, he can be characterised by an excess of imitated desire to belong to another class (al-Birrī, 2010). He consistently desires something new for himself. At one point it is "I want to see the world and live my life. I want—what do I want? I want to go to a bar when I want, and go out only if I want. I want to order when I want to order, and drink at the pace I want" (al-Birrī, 2010: 215).He fantasises about taking a jog at sunrise around Quba palace which is a routine that would be associated, in Egypt, with belonging to a privileged class. Even his dreams of being English are indicative of class envy. He also believes that "If I were English...I might have been a football player by now" (231). He

fakes an interest in football because “the English league is the best in the world and the Egyptian championship is a backwater parasite that we have to turn our backs to” (125). For Ibrāhīm, speaking English is not a vehicle to embark on some great career path, merely a way for an impoverished peasant (this is how he perceives himself) to appear more polished. After experiencing being a migrant in Britain, he starts fantasising of being a tourist instead because “it doesn’t hurt a tourist to speak in a broken language” (426). Fluency in language is important only as a determinant of class. He thinks that what he needs is to be a tourist and not an immigrant (to go on a *riḥla* not *hijra*), because the former entails gaining privilege while the latter might mean losing it. The implied author clearly, and sarcastically, presents Ibrāhīm’s desires as a series of imitations propelled by his obsession with ascending the social ladder.

Yāsir embodies Ibrāhīm’s ambitions; upper middle-class, son of two highly educated and successful parents, fluent in English, with a spotless London apartment, fashionable dress sense and business-like attitude. Yāsir’s ability to converse with Margret about cultural heritage sites in Italy fills Ibrāhīm with envy. He schedules a trip to Venice not because he has an interest in Italian history or art, as Yāsir and Margret obviously do, but because his inability to join that conversation was another example of his exclusion from Yāsir’s class. This novel adds another dimension to the seductiveness of the West to the Arab traveller: it is not that the West is imagined to be more advanced, progressive, or powerful as in the hypotexts but rather that the Westernised Egyptian traveller is imagined to belong to a higher class at home. Thus, the reasons for travelling West appear to be much less idealistic than in the past, when it was associated with the tradition of *ṭalab al ᶜilm,* or in cases like *Mawsim al-Ḥijra*, with conquest of an enemy. The association between travelling West and ascending in socioeconomic status is present in the hypotexts as well, as protagonists invariably benefited from the trip on their return. However, this was not their primary focus; Ismāᶜīl of Ḥaqqī’s (1944) novella has a genuine interest in gaining the scientific and medical knowledge in Europe that can aid Egyptian patients in his nation. Al-Birrī’s parody maximises the element of social ascension to the extreme: even the student in the novel, Ḥusayn, is not truly invested in his research project or enlightening his community, only in getting a degree that will allow him to rub elbows with

some powerful people such as Mufīd Shihāb, a notoriously corrupt Egyptian politician. Al-Birrī's negative value judgement of these characters is emphatically not because they have ambitions to succeed, but rather that when they do choose to imitate, they pick trivial, meaningless, or corrupt behaviours. They also make no real effort toward their goals as they are both lazy and opportunistic. The idea that the West is an obstacle to their progress is not imaginable in this late novel's framework.

In al-Ṭaḥāwī's (2010) novel, travel and the act of wandering is constructed as necessary for self-discovery and development. This idea is also present in Khuḍayrī's (2003) novel, where the narrator's boyfriend encourages her to "cross over. Leave to a place far away. Roam around other countries. Search, may you find a fair settlement with yourself" (151). These late novels seem highly conscious of the literary convention of the spontaneous desire to journey and travel, as the character's recollection of childhood aspirations to travel are narrated in ironical juxtapositions with adult realties: "She is lost in her errant dreams...dreaming of an old Cadillac with open windows that let in a breeze of air. She dreams of walking in countries she does not know, down endless roads" (al-Ṭaḥāwī, 2010: 165). Perhaps because of the stifling traditional environment where the young female characters were not allowed the freedom to "roam," travel is strongly desired, especially in al-Ṭaḥāwī's novel. She was not allowed out of the house while the male children "played out there in the open space" and she dreams, as a young girl, of "the days she goes out, never to return" (al-Ṭaḥāwī, 2010: 33). She is inspired by her grandmother's stories of Abu Zayd al-Hilālī.

Travelling for Hind, like the other characters in the hypertextual novels, was always associated with escaping from poverty. Coming from a village where people are "very backward" meant that the father could read about places and pretend he visited them. These imaginary trips gave him the air of sophistication he aspired to. Her father refused to travel to the Gulf like the other inhabitants of the village. The village changes as people travel, and imported goods start being sold. Immigrants send money back home and their families build beautiful houses, while her father, the one who remains, becomes relatively poorer after having boasted about coming from a family of descendants of the prophet and of being upper class. The mother, who aspires

to climb the social latter, implies that it would be better if the father travels or works, but his insistence on stability means they live in a crumbling old house. Hind's ideas about prospering and self-discovery abroad are crushed entirely. In New York, the narrative is structured around these flashbacks that take us back to her village of Tilāl Fir^{c}awn in Egypt and then abruptly back to Brooklyn:

> She didn't know her life would be a constant journeying, a long estrangement, like the story of Abu Zayd...She sleeps...dreaming of distant lands. Her dreams came true all at once. She now walks in Flatbush without a map, and knows a number of streets. She spends her days sitting in front of the supermarket...She now understands that some words are important for life, such as saving, coupons, and buy one get one free (al-Ṭaḥāwī, 2010: 49).

Travelling was, perhaps, an attempt to convert this life more into one that resembles her Doppelgänger, Lillette. That glamorous Egyptian lady is surrounded by as many rumours as Muṣṭafa Sa^{c}īd**:** "They say that her husband sent her money every week. They say she painted portraits of her son all the time. They say she studied at Princeton. They say a lot of things" (199). Whereas Lillette, with her beauty and glamour, can be a heroine that people talk about, Hind is not. Lillette's perfect life in the upmarket area of Garden City and the idyllic life in Egypt are complemented by a vibrant life in America. She has the words "I am free" tattooed in English on her back. These actions are narrated as acts of rebellion. Although she was given freedom in Cairo, had nannies to take care of her children, was out in clubs, gatherings and parties, and listened to Frank Sinatra (all indications of belonging to an elite class), unlike Hind, Lillette also yearned for something that could not be defined and could only be satisfied by continuous motion and being repeatedly uprooted. What connects Lillette and Hind seems to be the spontaneous desire to travel in search of self, one that is a shared intertext with prototypical, heroic male travellers such as Muṣṭafa Sa^{c}īd.

The intertext of the joy of travelling is compounded with the profound loneliness of it. That word "*ghurba*" in Arabic means a state of wandering, expatriation and estrangement. The word also, in the context of al-Ṭaḥāwī's novel, can be read as going West. To emigrate West implies being strange, being an outsider. As Lillette ages and starts losing her memory, her son realises "*innahā tatagharrab bi ^{c}aynayha*" (she wanders, becomes alienated, goes West, with her eyes) (201). Lillette's story functions as a form of wish

fulfilment for Hind. She is beautifully and cinematically tragic. Her life is eventful and she dies without remorse for her decisions. She captures the perfection of beauty, freedom, and eventfulness associated with the life of an iconic woman. Hind, contrarily, feels that her life is all a reflection of an unaccomplished one.

Hind's literary relationship with Lillette is typical of the host-double dynamic in the biographical novel, although the envy is less bitter than that of Ibrāhīm toward Yāsir, or Rashid toward his double in *ᶜAzīzī al-Sayyid Kawābātā* (al-Ḍaᶜīf, 1995). This is largely because like the other female protagonists in this study, her narrative tone is quieter, less sarcastic, and her emotions more muted. However the sources of envy are similar to those novels, and those are the perception that the double belongs to a higher class, appears more sophisticated, and is more charming/attractive/influential to others than the self. This also leads to more imagined sexual opportunities than the host can have. Al-Ṭaḥāwī's implied judgement of the main character seems to be in line with that of the other authors. Hind's weakness as a character seems to derive from her "adaptation of old movies," her inability to accept the "right size" of her spirit (al-Ṭaḥāwī, 2010: 213). In other words, like Ibrāhīm, she desires to imitate trivial behaviours that are ill-suited to the scope of her authentic self. Hind's various displays of autonomy in the novel are outlined by the confines of her personal traits. Her refusal to accept these prevents the development of the character.

III. Nationalism, socialism, sectarianism and their discontents for the traveller.

In the introduction to this dissertation, I cited Richards and Waterbury's (1996) claim about the ideological stance on foreign policy as the real determinant of radicalism on the Arab political front (as economic policies had too many similarities for any genuine ideological difference to be claimed). The authors described the situation in the Nineties where there was mass disillusionment with the ideologies of the previous generation that had emphasised concepts such as "freedom from imperial control," "mass literacy," and "equitable distribution of the benefits of economic growth" as empty "rhetoric… ultimately a target for derision and anger" (321-2). In Chapters Three and Four, most of the emphasis was on the socialistic or left-wing economic ideas of the political parties and movements in the past of the narrating self in the hypertextual novel. The contemporary biographical novel of political activism is a manifestation of the "derision and anger" directed at the simplistic optimism of the nationalist/socialist message in the hypotext. I contend that the contemporary travel novel is better suited to document the disillusionment with the anti-imperialist rhetoric of the previous generation.

Evidently, both categories of novels have dealt with numerous facets of the ideological framework of the pre-1967 era. Travel is a recurrent motif in most of the novels about politically active individuals. In most of my selected novels in the previous chapters, the episode of travel is of minor significance in the novel. Similarly, most of the novels in this chapter feature characters (especially minor ones) that are politically involved: soldiers, aspiring politicians, protestors, Islamic fundamentalists, radical artists, etc., but these also play a minimised role. Novels such as Munīf's (1995), Mīna's (1983), and Mustaghānimī's (1988) are equally about travel and political activism, and hence give equal significance to the critique of Arab nationalism's anti-imperialistic and socialistic discourse. In most of these novels, sectarianism is used as proof of the failure of the ideology inherent in the hypotexts. Clearly, the two thematic categories of novels that I have proposed serve the analysis of the ideological components tackled by each more than they do a purely formalistic description of sub-genre. However, if we consider travel and political activism to be aspects of genre convention that are maximised or minimised according to the purposes of the

authors, I believe this presents a valid categorisation if only for interpretive purposes. With this in mind, I will proceed to examine how the late Arabic travel novel has launched a critique of the abovementioned discourses.

In Ṣaliḥ's (1966) prototypical novel, Muṣṭafa Saᶜīd's communal rhetoric that focuses on the loss of power of his geographical realm to the West literally shapes the world map. Saᶜīd remains fixated on the historical moment "when the infidel gained a foothold in Muslim territory" (Newman, 2002, 8).The narrator assimilates his mediator's discourse to the extent that it structures the world's natural elements. As the obsession with the Doppelgänger increases, so does the fury toward the hegemony of the Northern (Western) sphere: "The Nile, after having flowed from the South to the North, suddenly bends in a right angle, and flows from the West to the East" (58). The allegory continues to become more deterministic:

> That river without which there would have been no beginning and no end, flows toward the North, it does not twist around anything. There could be a mountain that obstructs it making it flow East, and it might come upon an isle that makes it flow West. But sooner or later it must settle in its inevitable path toward the sea up North (Ṣaliḥ, 1966: 64).

This allegory unconsciously reflects the narrator's wrath about loss of influence: the cradle of civilisations on the river Nile provided the beginning of culture, but culture flowed up North. Edward Said (1994) captured this emotion in his description of the exiled intellectual who conceives of himself as a marginal, clinging on to "rigid ideological positions", and "experienc(ing) that fate…as a deprivation and as something to be bewailed" (Said, 1994: 62). The narrator's position at the end of the novel, drowning between the Northern and Southern shores of the Nile, reflects the dangers of the polarised "us versus them," alterist framework with which he constructed the world.

Muṣṭafa Saᶜīd views any alterations in what he believes is a pure cultural identity as adulterations, "contagions," and "lies". Already read into his confession is the idea that cultural assimilation is tantamount to violation. Muṣṭafa Saᶜīd's passion for Jane Morris enables her to destroy the symbols of his cultural and religious heritage: she tears down pages written in ancient Arabic calligraphy; she burns down a beautiful Persian prayer rug.[101] While *Mawsim al-Hijra* deals in the change and loss in identity caused by encounter,

[101] See Ṣaliḥ (2004: 141).

the more recent novels in this chapter deal in the illusory, deceiving nature of pure identity itself. *Mawsim al-Hijra* deals in collectivities and their dangers; in the newer novels there are no collectivities, only individuals. The prototypical novel ends on a note of resignation to the perceived status quo of having already been occupied, colonised, violated and an invitation to move on to a more optimistic future. The later novels begin from a point where the individual is a unique melting pot of cultures and ideas from which it is impossible to see a "pure" past.

The narrator of Ṣaliḥ's (1966) work discovers the fallacy of pure identity. Purity is an illusion, *it* is the lie. The implied value of the text is that it is a lie that having sex with a few women does anything to redeem the South of the atrocities committed against it (incidentally, an intertextual element referred to in works such as Mīna's, 1983, where Karam deeply regrets wasting time that should have been spent in real political resistance on women). Muṣṭafa Saᶜīd, or at least his conquests, are a figment of the narrator's imagination, and the novel seems to imply that the deaths, murders and the trial did not take place anywhere except in the narrator's fantasy. The victories and the humiliations of the imagined community that Muṣṭafa Saᶜīd symbolises are fantastical elements in the text. The implied author unveils the narrative constructs from which nations are formed as opposed to historical facts. While Muṣṭafa Saᶜīd believed the imperialist North "poisoned" the cultural purity of the South, the narrator wonders:

> Does this mean poison for our past and future? They will exit many countries. Railways, ships, hospitals, factories, schools will be ours. We will speak their language without feeling guilty or grateful. We will be as we are, ordinary people. If we are lies than we are lies of our own making (Ṣaliḥ, 1966: 47).

To be hybrid is to be "as we are". Thinking in generalities such as East vs. West, or Us vs. Them is futile, as it is unnecessary. This perception comes across as a defeat or recapitulation, something that one has to endure "through strength and through deception" (Ṣaliḥ: 151). This is prescient of the kind of message in al-Dīb's (1980) novel where letting go of socialism and nationalism was a necessary evil in order to reach the known Bildungsroman compromise (see previous Chapter).

Significantly, however, it is a compromise committed authors such as Munīf (1975) and Mīna (1983) refuse to make. The defiant defence of the Marxist/socialist element of commitment principles in these novels is paired with an obvious disregard of any residue of animosity toward the West assumed in hypotextual novels. The post-1967 era of self-reflection meant any wholesale condemnation of another for the shortcomings of the self were no longer convincing. Mīna maximises the literary conventional element of fascination with the West in his descriptions of Hungary. The writer attempts to break down the known East/West (or North/South) polarity by introducing differences within the nations in these realms: communist China and Hungary offer two radically different experiences to the traveller. Europe is neatly partitioned into well-defined nations where Hungary, France, Austria leave varying impressions on Karam, and nationals of Greece, Italy and Britain have unique national characteristics. Although this comprises a vision of the world along nationalistic lines, the novel's concrete geographical descriptions of Hungary, as opposed to the allegorical maps of *Mawsim al-Ḥijra ilā 'l-Shamāl* and *Sharq al-Mutawassiṭ*, compliments its attention to specific personality traits which is a characteristic of "methodological individualism" (Dumont, 1986). In other words, the novel's tendency to present the world in terms of specificities and details that add up to wholes, rather than whole entities that are symbolically mirrored in all of the spaces and characters of the novel is itself an indication of an emerging individualist discourse in that novel.

Mīna (1983) introduces additional dimensions to the Arab relation to the Western other, Arab nationalism and socialism than one would find in the prototypical pre-1967 commitment novel. Although the prominent speech genre of love of one's homeland within nationalist discourse is influential in his work, there is an acknowledgement that it is an unreciprocated love. The novel is prefaced with verses that refer to a contemporary sociolect in which the nation is ungrateful to the efforts of those who struggle for it to the extent that their work feels like servitude. These ideas are also embodied in the character of Khālid the Algerian war veteran as well (Mustaghānimī, 1988). The ending scenes of those two novels, written five years apart, are strikingly similar. Both protagonists have experiences in the airports of their nations that serve as reminders of how unappreciated they are. Karam is persecuted, taken away

from the airport in a police car. Khālid is forgotten: his war injury is invisible to the airport police officer. Mustaghānimī's voice is more forward looking in the way that her character's idealism is presented nostalgically; the implied reader of her novel feels the irony of Khālid's anomalistic existence in Algeria's present. In the final scene he is leaving Algeria, whereas Karam's return to Syria in Mīna's novel manifests a sincere belief that there is still a place for committed idealists at home. Both novels, however, present portraits of Arab nations where the simplistic world of a canonical *Iltizām* novel such as *al-Bāb al-Māftūh* (al-Zayyāt, 1960) seems increasingly distant.

Al-Rabiᶜ wa 'l-Kharīf has strong intertextual links with other political novels of that period of time. This can be seen in the false emotions and beliefs of its ideologues. Hadgy, the die-hard Hungarian nationalist and the many Marxist characters in that novel are shown to be hypocrites. Berushka describes Karam's supposedly committed life as "bohemian," where leisurely conversations about his homeland, "al-waṭan", usually take place with his intoxicated friends (Mīna, 1983: 270). This is a motif that was often repeated in novels of political activism (see Chapters Three and Four). Also, the promise of communism is critiqued in the novel, where Marxist political exiles and their children are shown to be living a bourgeois life:

> If a man wants to convert a son from radicalism, he only needs to send him to a socialist country for an education. There he finds everything ready for the taking and changes his ideas…As for those studying in the [capitalist] West, they have to wait every month for their parent's money or else they have to move out of their house because they are late for the rent, and they get hungry…and because they remain in need, they then think of oppression and injustice (Mīna, 1983: 179).

Mīna's narrative peaks in the unfolding of the events of the 1967 war. His novel presents an interesting example of the emerging discourse and the primary speech genres on that major historical event more than fifteen years after it took place. In this work, the pan-Arab and socialistic ideological 'givens' of the pre-1967 intellectuals and writers gets reconfigured. Confused by the conflicting news stories that emerge surrounding the war, the Arab immigrants believe that British and American news agencies are airing false news as a psychological war against the Arabs. The implied reader of the Eighties, when the novel was written, of course knows that is not true, and that it was their own side that practiced deception in the journalistic covering of that historical event.

What they, like Karam, had once believed was “the rock, the building, the strength, the authority” of the Arab nation and state was false and instead “what was inside the building was a wind, just a wind, and endless chains” (Mīna, 1983: 313). The war also differentiates the “other” of the West, a realm that was homogenous in Ṣaliḥ’s (1966) work, with nationalities varying in their response to Israel’s attack. The Arabs, however, remain a unified, homogenous entity in that novel. The region is constructed as having identical problems and needs in a way similar to Munīf’s (1975) prototype. This is not the case in the other travel novels of the Eighties I present in this chapter (al-Shaykh’s and Mustaghānimī’s) where the context is specific to Lebanon and Algeria.

The hypertextual novels in this chapter use different strategies to critique the idea of homogenous, pure cultural identities that can be placed in well-defined geographic locations. All of them describe localities inhabited by diverse people. The Iraqi women writers, Khuḍayrī (1999) and Kachachī (2008), personify resistance to ideas of cultural purity in their characters. Khuḍayrī’s autobiographical narrator’s relationship with her British mother is all but destroyed because of the father’s insistence on her “not mixing up” her identity. The girl has to be cautious not to speak any English words in front of her father. She feels that being hybrid would prevent her from being “decipherable” or “understandable” and in retrospect, she says: “I learnt not to merge the two languages in my speech” (Khuḍayrī: 20-21). She identifies wholly as an Iraqi. She cannot speak her mother tongue because, like Muṣṭafa Saᶜīd, the Western aspect of her identity must be hidden and repressed. Her hybridity causes a lot of anxiety in her home, and the efforts to appear culturally authentic are strenuous. Only after her father’s death and her move to Britain can she begin a normalised relationship with her mother. The implied author of this novel does not present this as a necessary reality of having parents from different cultures but rather offers a subtle polemic against essentialism that destroys human connections.

If al-Ṭayyib Ṣaliḥ’s geographical realms were constructed as having been originally culturally pure, the hidden interior polemic of that novel urges the reader to consider that hybridity did not need to have such tragic consequences. In the hypotext, hybridity is confined to travellers; those that have the privilege to learn about other cultures and visit them were also those

cursed, like Muṣṭafa Saᶜīd, with the burden of not belonging wholly to either realm. I mentioned that hypertextual novels, conversely, begin from a point where hybridity is a given. In al-Birrī's (2010) *Raqṣa Sharqiyya*, Ibrāhīm comes from a remote small village in Upper Egypt. The first few pages of the novel set the tone for the character: he is a petty, ignorant and provincial young man, not at all endowed with any of the romantic aura that often surrounds heroes from rural areas. But this provincial character does not have an 'authentic' Egyptian identity before he emigrates to Britain as one would expect in the tradition of the travel novel. As a teenager, he is a fan of Claudia Schiffer and Naomi Campbell, and knows the details of the Lewinsky scandal. That remote town of Bani Mur is not totally isolated from the world, and its youngsters are unlikely to ask the questions the villagers asked the narrator of *Mawsim al-Ḥijra ilā 'l-Shamāl* on his return from Europe. The writer is already deconstructing the sharp binary oppositions between the remote, isolated traditional village of the nation in comparison to the European metropolis that have been so common in this sub-genre so far, as in *Qindīl 'Umm Hāshim* and *Mawsim al-Ḥijra ilā 'l-Shamāl*. One of the principles of nationalism is that those that belong to the nation have a homogenous identity. In the Arab context, this meant an attachment to the Arabic language, Arab cultural norms, and a historical narrative about the accomplishments of Arabs (or Muslims). Clearly, this un-Westernised upper Egyptian protagonist has a different frame of reference than characters in hypotextual narratives informed by a nationalistic discourse.

Al-Birrī's (2010) culturally hybrid characters present a polemic against ideas of pure identities, but this writer goes further and overtly parodies the essentialism of utterances about identities in the text. The novel's title "Oriental Dance" reflects the illusory nature of these cultural and political forces that have haunted the sub-genre so far. The oriental dance it refers to is Katya's desired profession. Katya herself is a Lebanese woman living in London for the most part of the novel. She is not at all a "type" representing Arab women. Katya's attitude to men and sex is not characteristic of the Arab woman in a realist novel. Khālid al-Birrī embodies some of the complexities of cultural difference in the twenty first century in Katya's oriental dance. Firstly, Katya goes to London to find a haven where she can freely express something considered oriental, as her mother would not accept her doing that in Lebanon. The Western audience

to which she might perform this oriental dance is irrelevant. It is only the freedom offered in the West that is required for Katya to be able to perfect her skills as a dancer. Secondly, despite being an Arab, she is Lebanese and is therefore not the perfect candidate to be an oriental dancer because that woman, according to popular myth, must be Egyptian, as her dance instructor illustrates:

> To be a belly dancer, you have to know how to flirt in Egyptian...you have to wake up in the morning to the smell of fried falafels and the sight of people cuing up to eat them...to know how to dance you must laugh in Egyptian, joke in Egyptian, sass in Egyptian, and love in Egyptian (al-Birrī, 2010: 347).

Finally, this essentialist rhetoric about being a perfect Egyptian oriental dancer is completely removed from reality for an Egyptian like Ibrāhīm. As he listens to Katya obsess about not being Egyptian enough for the dance he thinks "I listened to this lunacy and honestly did not know what to say" (347). Despite the dance itself being a cultural performance, any attempt to consciously perform this culture is nothing but "nonsense" and "lunacy". There is no location essential to this dance (it is performed in London), there is no nationality that monopolises it (it is performed by a Lebanese woman), there is no one culture that exoticises it (it is, after all, a Lebanese woman that utters these "lunacies" and not a European one) and there is no consensus to its meaning or significance in its imagined "original" locality or nation (Egyptians mock the aura associated with it).

The oriental dance performed in London in this novel is un-Western and un-Eastern. This is an important motif in this novel: Katya's performance of the oriental dance in London is mirrored in the text by the recital of the Quran at a London mosque. Ḥusayn's visits to the London mosque provide rich encounters not with a singular European other but with an array of Muslim others. The immigrant community in al-Birrī's novel is as equally diverse as the European one in Mīna's. In London, Ibrāhīm's closest associations are with a community of immigrants like himself. This new feature of the travel genre is also repeated in the other novels in this chapter, where the destination (be it London, Paris, New York or Africa) is never a place where you encounter another homogenous community. London is a truly cosmopolitan setting in al-Birrī's novel, and it is described realistically with its bus routes and tube lines, as well

as its spirit as experienced by the characters. London is not a place where Ibrāhīm encounters English or European people. For the most part, he deals with Arabs like himself, albeit ones he would not have met in Bani Mur. There is not one Encounter but many smaller encounters that are necessitated by a truly diverse locality. This is an interesting development in the genre because it shows the diversity of Europeans (and Americans) as well as immigrants. Perhaps it is this diversity that causes Ibrāhīm to be less conscious of his marginalised status in society than the protagonists of the hypotexts. The only incident in which he believes he has been discriminated against is authored in a manner that sets it out as a simple case of Ibrāhīm's sexual harassment of a European woman, not discrimination by an English person.[102]

Ḥanān al-Shaykh (1980) offers another strategy of reconfiguring the convention of encounter with the other through travel. In Africa, the Lebanese community appears to coalesce to gain the privileges of a settled, racist expatriate community. However, the class differences between the members of this group undermine any façade of unity they have abroad. Zahra's marries her compatriot Mājid in Africa only for the purpose of solving the issue of her nonvirginity, but on her return to Lebanon she is quick to re-establish the hierarchy of classes that she was accustomed to. She is relieved to be divorced from the man that had a "different family environment" than hers (al-Shaykh, 1980: 132). The numerous sects and classes of Lebanon explain the frailty of the concept of the imagined nation in that novel.

In Ṣaliḥ's (1966) prototype, the planet is divided in two unified but separate spheres. In the narrative Muṣṭafa Saʿīd is associated with symbols of many identities: African, Muslim, Arab, Persian, Bedouin. These are felt to have something in common: they all belong to the oppressed, subaltern sphere of the South. Al-Birrī (2010) unravels this discourse in *Raqṣa Sharqiyya*. In this hypertextual novel, Ḥusayn is a devout Muslim who feels alienated in the London mosque, a place he is supposed to feel peaceful and more at home. Pakistanis, Bangladeshis and Indians insert strange Arabic words in their sentences leaving him ill at ease: "He doesn't feel comfortable with [the mosque's] actions or the actions of the people that surround him. Everything

[102] See 112.

enervates him: "*In shā'a 'llāh*," "*al-ḥamdu li 'lāh*," "*subhān allāh*" and "*yā shāykh*" thrown in where they don't belong" (328). The idea of his own culture and language mimicked by others throws him off guard. When Mālik, the English convert to Islam tells Ḥusayn "I love you unto God," Ḥusayn is flustered and thinks the gesture is "un-Western and un-Eastern. Ultra-Islamic, like the chants on a Friday demonstration" (333). These words, "un-Western and un-Eastern", echo the highly mystical verse from the Quran (ayat al-nūr) that Ḥusayn was reading earlier:

> Lit from a blessed Tree, an Olive, *neither of the east nor of the west*, whose oil is well-nigh luminous, though fire scarce touched it (my italics, 145, translated by Yusuf Ali (1938)).

But unlike that sacred olive tree that naturally reaches perfection by being *"lā-sharqiyya and lā-gharbiyya"* (un-Eastern and un-Western), Malik's Islamist performance make him a discomforting anomaly for Ḥusayn. The Sheikh giving the Friday sermon hovers dangerously near a discussion about jihad. This sermon is so alien to him that it needs to be translated into his own language.[103] Ḥusayn's discomfort in the mosque is significant because, although it happens in Europe, it is a clear allusion to the deep schism in his own native community. When he is reminded of "the chants on a Friday demonstration," he is thinking about protests against the state that Islamists are likely to participate in in his country of origin.[104] This is a clear reference to the dangerous clash of ideologies and sectarian issues in Egypt as opposed to the civilisational clash that Muṣṭafa Saᶜīd experienced in the prototype.

Al-Birrī's (2010) portrayal of sectarian animosities and other forms of discrimination at home is typical of the late Arab novel. In Khuḍayrī's (1999) novel, the Muslim narrator's relationship with a Christian Iraqi must end. Shamᶜūn's (2005) autobiographical novel, *ᶜIraqī fī Parīs*, tells the story of a Christian Assyrian man from an impoverished family that gets forcefully repatriated in Iraq. The novel also describes instances of discrimination against poor Egyptian immigrant workers in Iraq, but none of French discrimination against the Iraqi in Paris. Sam in Shamᶜūn's novel also has to endure Arabs in France assuming he is a Muslim. In Kachachī's (2008) novel, there are also no incidences of discrimination in America. As mentioned above, cultural

[103] See 329.

[104] Musawi (2009) gives an excellent analysis of the codes of such radical Friday sermons in contemporary literature.

differences and hostile encounters in the West are minimised, if at all present, in these novels. Essentially, the dangerous encounter with Otherness happens in the Arab county. In al-Birrī (2010), for example, the character who suffers a psychosis similar to the narrator and Muṣṭafa Saᶜīd in *Mawsim al Hijra* is Yāsir, the middle-class Egyptian who is ostracized because his father commits suicide and because he gets his Coptic girlfriend pregnant. Contrarily, as Ibrāhīm enviously notices, Yāsir fits in smoothly in London.

While racial and cultural differences in London are portrayed as illusory and devoid of real substance, like Katya's idea of an oriental dance or Ibrāhīm's beliefs about English cleanliness, in Egypt religious differences are experienced as real and dangerous. The teenage Yāsir is involved in an Islamic fundamentalist group. His pregnant Coptic girlfriend's disappearance hides dangerously in the narrative, erupting out in psychotic and highly superstitious instances. The psychiatrist in the final pages of the novel believes a Coptic doctor on the panel assessing Yāsir's condition is "their man," by which he means the pawn of the English in the hospital (al-Birrī, 2010: 584). Superstition pervades among even the most educated and Westernised Egyptians, especially Yāsir and his father (again challenging the old Eastern Superstition/Western Science dichotomy common in the travel novel so far). The incredible events that lead to Ibrāhīm's death in Venice started with Yāsir falling in love with a Coptic girl, in Egypt. Jane Morris' hostile gaze in Ṣaliḥ's (1966) prototypical novel is often repeated in hypertextual narratives in the eyes of other compatriots. The West is not responsible for the tragedies in the late novel because they are initiated at home.

Al-Ṭaḥāwī's (2010) novel is similar in its portrayal of the animosities that begin in Hind's hometown. Hind's attachment to the symbol of pan-Arab pride, the Arabic language, is described as "obsolete and extinct" and she says that her relationship with Arabic reflects how "she gets attached to things in an obsessive manner" (al-Ṭaḥāwī, 2010: 22). Benedict Anderson (1983) explains that languages like Arabic contributed to the formation of communities which laid the foundation for modern nationalisms. Hind's exaggerated attachment to this aspect of Arab cultural identity is therefore a reference to one of the most important tenets of Arab nationalism. That it is portrayed as reflective of the failure to be open to others, to progress out of "obsoleteness" and engage with

the world, is a testament to the implied antinationalistic values that the novel contains.

Even the diversity of Brooklyn reminds Hind of home. The Mexican and Arab ghettos are similar, in her eyes, to the Coptic neighbourhoods in her village. She remembers the names of some of her Coptic friends and how their "houses stand adjacent to each other, creating familiarity between their inhabitants" (77). She narrates events where a church was burnt in her village on numerous occasions. When plans for a new church went into action, a new larger mosque was built. The tone of Hind, the present narrator, in remembering these acts of violence and persecution reveals a muted horror and remorse over her implication in them. As a child, she made it a mission for herself to convert the Coptic Angel to Islam. Hind describes Angel as an avoidant girl who "appears submissive most of the time, because she can't be anything other than that" (al-Ṭaḥāwī, 2010: 73). In New York, Hind's role is reversed. She becomes the isolated minority member, and appears to now have a better understanding of the discrimination she partook it. Importantly, this experience is enhanced by the Egyptian Copt Saʿīd, who in the safety of New York attempts to convert *her*, the religious minority member, to Christianity. Again, Western or white characters are absent from the dynamics of this poetic justice.

This strong Coptic presence in the novel constructs the Egyptian village as a diverse locality in itself. This is further underscored when goods start coming in from Saudi Arabia; women were sent to marry rich Saudis, the language of the village started changing, with more use of alienating *fuṣḥa* Arabic such as *"jazāka 'allāhu khayran"* (may God grant you goodness) (131). The Arabic language that is a foundational element of pan-Arab ideology is an alienating force in al-Birrī and al-Ṭaḥāwī. Everyone in Hind's home town has travelled, and the ones that remained have been touched by the wind of change. Her father supports Egyptian liberalism while his own devout son confronts him violently about his drinking. Hind's family are known for being of Bedouin origins, while the other villagers are not. Hind's own place of birth bustles with as much difference as New York.

Furthermore, cultural assimilation is not merely a reality to be accepted but a desirable fact. In Khuḍayrī's (1999) novel, the narrative is driven by the desire to unite the two clashing halves of the character's identity in order to make her

reach a “fair settlement”. The dance troupe is trying to keep the Western art of ballet alive and well in the East and resent the difficulties they face. The Madam recites Appolinaire when drunk. These enclaves of Western cultural performances isolate the troupe from the surrounding war and the reality outside. Hybridity in civil war becomes a form of escape and survival. In *Raqṣa Sharqiyya*, Ibrāhīm the tourist is drawn to hybridity instead of purity. He refers to a controversial art project by artist Gregor Schneider that replicated the Kaaba in the middle of Piazza San Marco. He likes what he interprets as its meaning, that “cultures are similar in their essence” (al-Birrī, 2010: 479). His attraction to hybridity makes him perceive similarity, not difference. In *Mawsim al-Ḥijra*, the purity of the villagers in the Sudan was described idealistically, as was Muṣṭafa Saᶜīd’s exotic multiculturalism (Ṣaliḥ, 1966). The identity of the villagers does change through encounter with Muṣṭafa Saᶜīd, but the loss of their original peaceful and authentic state is painfully felt. In the hypertextual novels, the longing for a culturally pure identity has disappeared from the genre. Instead, those mediators imagined to be multicultural and cosmopolitan such as Lillette, the estranged Egyptian woman who misses her family in Cairo but is drawn to the West, monopolise desire in the novel (al-Ṭaḥāwī, 2010).

The most important feature in these biographical novels is the oppositional discourse to any concept that places the individual within a larger collective entity, be it national, sectarian or socioeconomic. Ideas of nationalism and socialism necessitate that man sees his history and destiny are connected to that of many others. Political events in the present are therefore believed to be of relevance to every member of the group. In hypertextual novels, however, characters are constructed in ways that defy expectations about identity and class. In the novel of political activism, any collective action was shown to be temporary and delusional. In the travel novel incidences of harmonious existence within a larger cultural entity, if they occur, are also short-lived and associated with a psychosis. Zahra and Ibrāhīm’s attempt to belong in Africa and Venice, respectively, are symptomatic of mental break down (al-Shaykh, 1980; and al-Birrī, 2010). In Khuḍayrī (1999) the ballet instructor insists that the narrator dissolve herself in the dance and the group: “In order to be a member of the group, you have to forget the confines of your body” (104). The ballet troupe’s activities end when the war does, reminiscent of Zahra’s experience in

al-Shaykh's novel. In both these novels the confessional "I" dissolves into a 'we' during a war. News about wars consistently breaks the flow of narration of personal events in the character's lives. The "I" becomes subsumed in a group and is muted by the violence. The experience of dissolving oneself in a larger group, though pleasant and even euphoric, is often necessitated by extremely violent and short-lived external realties.

Furthermore, important historical events are not reflected in the lives of characters. In Khuḍayrī, the news flashes that intercept that the narrator's personal story are felt to be interruptions rather than contextualizing episodes. The effect of this technique in Sunᶜallah Ibrāhīm's (1992) realist novel Dhāt was to place the changes in the character's life within a sociopolitical context. Dhāt (the Arabic word for "self") in that novel was a character symbolising the identity of an entire nation. She was a product of social and historical factors. The narration of external events gave birth to and enriched the character. But in Khuḍayrī's autobiographical work the news flashes break up the personal narrative, truncate the character's development and further increase the distance between her own life and the events in the socio-political world. This is a similar device to that employed by al-Shaykh in *Ḥikāyat Zahra,* where the uncle and the husband's confession interrupt what is supposed to be Zahra's autobiography; the two men usurp her voice and tell Zahra's story for her. In *Brooklyn Heights*, frequent flashbacks interrupt the chronological narration of events in a technique that highlights the protagonist's inability to move on from the past (al-Ṭaḥāwī, 2010). The interruptions to these confessions are reflections of the character's incapacity to reach wholesome selfhood because of their excessive vulnerability to external beings and events.

Al-Birrī (2010) shows how rhetoric on politics, society and religion is distant from the solid concerns of his characters such as money, love and family. Ibrāhīm and Ḥusayn fake an interest in a general ideological debate only as a pretext to access the sexual and the intimate.[105] It is striking in this contemporary novel that this narrator does not belong to a group of intellectuals in Egypt that are expected be involved in discussions about immigration problems in Britain, the struggles of the working class, racial discrimination or to

[105] See 337-340.

be critical about the behaviour of the middle-class. But the author gives him the capability to behave and think outside what a reader would ordinarily expect from this character.[106] Unlike protagonists of realist novels that are a function of social determinants, Ibrāhīm is able to think as an individual. The problem with Ibrāhīm not that he is too simple to understand politics, it is that he finds it irrelevant. Ibrāhīm does not take politics seriously unless it serves his own ends.

To emphasise this individualistic message, al-Birrī's uses newspaper articles as paratexts to frame Ibrāhīm's story. The newspaper articles in the beginning and ending of the novel reveal that Ibrāhīm's narrative, entirely his own version of events, is unrelated to those reported by Reuters (or underreported by al-Ahram). His personal biography seems at odds with the news, either because there were elements he concealed, thought were irrelevant or alternatively, were made up somewhere in the news chain. It is almost impossible to 'place' Ibrāhīm's individual story within the political saga outlined by Reuters. For Ibrāhīm, the personal is clearly *not* the political. For this reason, hypertextual biographical novels do not merely attempt to describe the failure of the ideologies of the previous generation. Failure in the biographical novel must be narrated as personal.

[106] See 130, for example.

IV. Travel and the Bildungsroman compromise

In Ṣaliḥ's (1966) *Mawsim al-Ḥijra ilā 'l-Shamāl*, both the narrator and Muṣṭafa Saᶜīd are men with some degrees of success on the professional front. The details of their positions are unclear but they are esteemed men in their community and appear to suffer no economic hardships. Gregory Castle (2006) claims that the tendency of modernist and postcolonial Bildungsromane to end in failure to achieve Bildung emphasises the lack of opportunities available to working classes and people in colonised nations. In this novel, being both, the failure of these two characters is not in the area of pragmatic Bildung; in spite of their marginalised status as postcolonials, these otherwise successful men are failures in their private lives. Marriages and love affairs in this novel end tragically because of extrinsic considerations; Ḥusna murders the old man traditions forced her to accept as a husband, and Muṣṭafa Saᶜīd murders his wife as revenge for colonialism. The narrator's final awakening to the possibilities of living with "strength and deception" is a good example of Moretti's (1987) ideological compromise (Ṣaliḥ, 1966: 151). In order for this protagonist to carry on enjoying the pleasures of life, his cigarette, and to maintain his relationship with those few individuals he cares about in his private life, he must compromise his ideological beliefs and his struggle against that "great European violence" (87). This final epiphany is meant to be understood as an arrival to the wisdom of maturity after the turmoil of youthful idealism. To succeed personally, he must fail ideologically.

But Munīf's (1975) novel, as an example of the aftermath of *Iltizām* and 1967, is even bleaker. Rajab attempts to enact the conventional compromise of his principles by betraying his cause and his friends in order to have an ordinary personal life, but the extreme oppressiveness of the state and the effect of torture on his health have ruled that personal life out. Agency is a prerequisite of compromise, and the characters in Munīf's novel have none. This novel maintains *Iltizām's* principle of the congruity of the personal and the political but, perhaps reflecting the dismal mood of the post-1967 intellectual climate in which it was written, it directly inverts them. In *al-Bāb al-Māftūh*, invisible historical forces led the individual and the nation together to a bright, hopeful future (al-Zayyāt, 1960). In Munīf, the individual and the nation are failing together and the light at the end of the tunnel is incredibly distant. These

outlooks, as I have discussed in previous chapter, are evidence that the implied writers place the blame on political forces for collective and individual failures. Whether these forces are those of the British Occupation (al-Zayyāt) or tyrannical Arab regimes (Munīf) reflects the historical moment in which each of these novels was written. Because characters symbolise the nation, true (and lasting) compromise is inconceivable in these novels. This explains the lack of character development characteristic of the Bildungsroman.

The overall tone of Mīna's (1983) work is one of dismay about the failures of the Arab intelligentsia, particularly Marxists living abroad. There are many elaborations on their failure to show commitment to their nations due to the distractions of expatriation. There is also a note of blame for escaping the real struggle at home in exile. The Karam that occupies the majority of the narrative time is a failure as a true political activist. The implication is that he is living a rather thrilling social life, but he is failing as a professional writer and committed believer. In the end, he matures by compromising his beautiful life in Budapest to return to being persecuted at home. Karam's compromise is the opposite of that of the narrator in Ṣaliḥ's work (1966). The compromise itself, however, functions similarly in this novel. It shows a depth of character and displays an outcome for a narrative of (some) soul-searching and self-analysis. It proves he has agency and has chosen to live up to the idealised version he envisions of himself. The profoundly serene emotions he feels in the ending scene of the narrative owe to him finally matching his actions with his reflections, as the mature Bildugsroman hero does, and not because these actions are going to significantly change his country (Hardin, 1991). The remnants of *Iltizām* in this older writer lie in his portrayal of a character who makes the committed choice.

In the late biographical novel, failure derives from the individual's inability to transform, mature and develop through self-knowledge and compromise. When Shihibi (2009) describes the dissenting ideologies inherent in the earliest *riḥlas*, he stresses that the texts structurally enact a compromise between two opposing world views. Either the wanderer matures and returns, as a better man, to occupy the social role for which he was destined. Alternatively, due to his excessive valour, society makes an exception for this outcast and reincorporates him (ʻImru'u ʻl-Qays and ᶜAntara, respectively). In both these tropes, society presents the opposing force to the desires of the traveller. In the

prototypical *novel*, external social and political forces cause the individual to fail. In contemporary novels, however, there is a shift of emphasis to the individual's responsibility for self-actualisation. The concept of personal accountability is maximised. Nowhere in the grim confessions of Hind, Sam, or Ibrāhīm (al-Ṭaḥāwī, Shamᶜūn, al-Birrī respectively) does a facile social critique of the poverty or discrimination against immigrants in the West present itself. As al-Kharrāṭ (1993) notices in the trend of New Sensibility, "the real obstacles are not to be found in social traditions. The novel doesn't operate on the social level alone, in fact any social complexes are easily resolved and do not deserve all this suffering" (71). The failure in these novels confirms Ken Seignuerie's (2004) theory of the emergence of a new Arab humanism that places emphasis on the transformation of the self and not on commitment to transform societies, nations or the region.

In the hypertextual novel, there are more blanket failures. Failures on both the professional and the private fronts are more common, and are directly attributable to tragic character flaws. To recap on the related point in Chapter Four, political activists failed personally because of their radicalism. In the late novels discussed, familial and romantic relationships were minimised as events in the text only to exaggerate their significance. The failure of political activists to invest in their private life was synonymous with becoming socially irrelevant. In the the selected travel novels, more attention is given to romantic and sexual relationships because of the prominent literary convention of the travel novel. A resignification takes place regarding the equation between the public and the private in the hypertextual travel novel.

Sam and Ibrāhīm (Shamᶜūn and al-Birrī) cannot find employment or true friendships and romantic relationships. Ibrāhīm is enraged when his friends show incredulity at the idea of a girl falling in love with him: "Every word they say can only mean one thing. You, Ibrāhīm, do not deserve to be loved in the ordinary way, in the ordinary circumstances where a girl loves a man" (al-Birrī, 2010, 501). Like Zahra, his manipulative behaviour, desperation and lack of strength make him fail at relationships and at the few menial jobs he has (Zahra also quits her job at a hospital soon after it starts). In Khuḍayrī's (1999) novel, the narrator's ambitions to be a ballerina fail: there is no place for this kind of

cultivation in war torn Iraq, but she is shown to hang on to her hopes against all odds.

Single-minded obsessiveness with ideas or occupations determines failures for several characters such as Sam (Shamᶜūn, 2005), Hind (al-Ṭaḥāwī, 2010) and the narrator of *Qiṣat Hubb Mājūsiyya* (Munīf, 1999). Just as the political activists spent their youth chasing ideas that they did not fully understand, so do the travellers in this chapter go to distant countries in hope of actualising dreams that are not suited to their actual capabilities? In travel narratives, the Western journey is associated with unrealistic expectations and obsessive behaviour. While in most Bildungsromane failure prompts compromises, in these narratives the failure is defined by the refusal to make compromises. Al-Ṭaḥāwī's protagonist, for example, is fixated on creative occupations such as writing and acting. For the majority of the narrative, she implies that being of the female gender is the reason for her failure. But the reader may find this unconvincing because her preoccupation with being a writer and a woman is portrayed as unbalanced.

> Writing is *disobedient like a hurt female*....she cries a lot, and searches like a madwoman for that little girl that used to live inside her...she smoked hash and took hold of a pen and paper and she didn't write...she slept for long, when she woke up her toddler put his whole small body on her face, crying "mmmama." He was wet, the smell of his crap filled her nose. He was hungry and in tears (my italics, al-Ṭaḥāwī, 2010: 140).

Such descriptions of the failure of Sam to write the one screenplay or Hind to write poetry (or act, dance, be in love) recurs in the texts. Al-Ṭaḥāwī and Shamᶜūn do not indicate that the circumstances of being a woman (in the former), a Christian (in the latter) or a poor immigrant (both) are the reasons for the failure. Rather, the dream itself is false and based on a lack of self-knowledge. Their stories are reminiscent of al-Kharrāṭ's (1993) description of a character that exemplifies *New Sensibility* who "throws himself into an experience that is evidently doomed to fail, but his predilection for suffering alone comprises the only possible victory available to him.…in the journey of the twentieth century…non-hero … [there is] an inner world that has taken for itself the limits of the whole universe" (66-7).

The female authors of the novels discussed in this chapter do grant their characters an agency some-what constrained (if only psychologically) by their role in their families and nations. The female narratives are emphatic about the necessity of compromise between individual desire and social integration that make them “inherently contradictory” (Morretti, 1987). The male narratives underplay this compromise by placing more weight on the ability to transform the self and are therefore less contradictory. What does take place in these narratives is that the characters’ imitated desire embodied in mediators or doubles does not eventually culminate in a unity, even a temporary one, with this other. The narrator in *Mawsim al-Hijra* merges with his other, Saʿīd, and thus *becomes* something qualitatively different; he *synthesises* himself from a dialectical relationship with another. The more contemporary characters fail to achieve this, either due to the equidistance maintained with the double throughout the text or, in al-Birrī’s (2010) novel, because allowing the boundaries of the self to collapse is evidence of unfruitful irrationality. Zahra’s existence in particular is so claustrophobic and self-absorbed that there are no significant mediators in her narrative (al-Shaykh, 1980). The psychological isolation of the contemporary characters necessitates that their success must derive from intrinsic forces.

In many of these novels, self-perception and consequent self-development do not happen. When they do, they happen toward the very end of the narrative, and/or in cyclical epiphanic episodes that fall short of fulfiling the expectation of character development that the narrative structure invites. The frustrating failures of these characters are often juxtaposed with examples of choice and free will and, therefore, have the effect of burdening the reader with the weight of responsibility that comes with an individualistic outlook. Their failure to achieve Bildung, as Gregory Castle (2006) observes in his study of the genre, serves to endorse the importance of the concept.

V. The evolution of a subgenre: *riḥla am hijra*?

In this chapter I have outlined the features of a genre of the Arabic novel that narrates the biography of an individual by focusing on his or her experiences as a traveller or a migrant. This sub-genre belongs to a larger category of biographical novels that present a person's life story as a reflection of inherent personality traits and autonomous choices. Features of genre, such as the recurrence of the character's creative and artistic output, the presence of Doppelgängers, the tendency to present an individual's life of frustrated goals and compromises aim to give a better understanding of the biographical genre. In stressing these features, I have not attempted to give a static definition of genre but rather offer a summary of the "horizons of expectation for readers" and "models of writing for authors" that the genre creates (Todorov, 2000: 199).

Far from being static, the sub-genre of the biographical travel novel shows constant transformation of structure and resignification of generic codes. One of the most visible of these is the minimisation or removal of the return journey. In *Mawsim al-Ḥijra ilā 'l-Shamāl*, the narrator's very first words are "I returned to my family" (Ṣaliḥ, 1966: 5). He says he learned a lot, and missed a lot about Europe, "but that is another story" (5). This is not a story about travel and migration as much as it is about returning. The return journey was essential to the cannon of travel novels cited in the introduction to this chapter; for travel was primarily a vehicle for encounter in prototypical novels, and encounter in turn was a prompt to reassess the character's relationship with and perception of his original culture. I have argued that the role of encounter as a constituent of subjectivity has been minimised in the hypertextual novels I have studied, and therefore the need to return to the native country to see it with a fresh perspective has been eliminated. In cases where there is a return, it is a temporary one such as Khālid's in *Dhākirat al-Jasad* (Mustaghānimī, 1988). Khālid's and Zayna's final destination (*al-Ḥafīda al-'Amrīkiyya*, Kachachī, 2008) is the West. Even Karam's return at the end of *al-Rabīᶜ wa 'l-Kharīf* pales in comparison to the long narrative time in which he was abroad (Mīna, 1983). In the other novels, the characters think about returning home only fleetingly. The "seasonal migration" of the prototype transformed into a permanent one; travel

literature of “undirected or circuitous motion” has evolved into equally unsettled migrant literature (Smethurst and Keuhn, 2009, 14).

This transformation has been accompanied by one in the narrative tonesof this subgenre, which had previously been serious and romantic.[107] Muṣṭafa Saʿīd seems to be the only immigrant in the world of Ṣaliḥ’s novel; this fact alone makes him a Sudanese pioneer. He is also the first Sudanese man to ever marry a white woman (according to the narrative). Conversely, to Yāsir’s dismay, nobody is as fascinated by the story of his family: “Dr Aḥmad Sabrī, the hard-working man that came from a poor family and studied in Europe, committed suicide. He had a son that joined *al-Jamāʿa al-Islāmiyya* and became mentally ill, and the doctor didn’t care to hear the story?” (al-Birrī, 2010: 293). Again the offspring of the immigrants that went to West, such as those in Khuḍayrī (1999) and Kachachī (2008) are not so tragic themselves; the authors refuse to engage in strategic exoticism of their stories.[108] I have shown that the more the implied authors display a consciousness of the alterist discourse of their literary predecessors, the more likely they are to employ overt parody and create less sympathetic characters that desire to repeat the conventional journey. Other authors present a hidden interior polemic through sympathetic, but misguided characters. Most novels employ a spectrum of metatextual techniques to reinvent the subgenre.

To an extent, *Maswim al-Hijra* itself provided a critique of the idea of the returning intellectual, the hero that would modernise his society by applying the learning he achieved in the West. This hero would expect to attain social recognition in the manner of Rifaʻa al-Ṭahṭawī or Ṭaha Ḥusayn (or fictional characters with comparable biographies). But the Western encounter in *Mawsim al-Hijra* takes a personal toll on the private lives of the characters from which there is no return, as the final question, “*hal hia riḥla am hijra*?” (is it a journey or a migration?) indicates (Salih, 1966: 151). Mīna’s (1983) message about the role of the returning intellectual is also pessimistic.

The contemporary narratives end in immigration with characters concerned about the eventuality of dying in a foreign land. Benedict Anderson (1983) discussed nationalism’s peculiar preoccupation with death when compared to

[107] See Bhaba (1994) and Smethurst and Keuhn (2009).
[108] See Huggan (2001) and the conclusion to this thesis.

other modern ideologies such as Marxism or liberalism. Nationalism venerates death for one's country and also attaches individuals to the idea of being buried in their nation. So, when Ibrāhīm dies in a foreign land, especially one that he is visiting alone as a tourist, this epitomises the theme of alienation and draws attention to the genre's movement away from the nationalistic ideas of the hypotexts (al-Birrī, 2010). But whereas the male characters can play with the idea of going back if necessary, the women in these narratives have nothing to return to, or in more extreme cases, such as Zayna (Kachachī, 2008) and Lillette (al-Ṭaḥāwī, 2010) have no right of return. The former violates the patriotic code by invading her country and the latter violates her gender role by deserting husband and child.

In spite of the present subtext about the invisible forces that push characters to emigrate permanently, these novels uphold al-Kharrāṭ's (1993) hypothesis about the trend of *New Sensibility* in the post-1967 novel; there is no predestination in the world views of their implied authors. Because the self is not overdetermined by the position to which it was born, the need to return to points of origin is diminished. In *Mawsim al-Ḥijra*, the final drowning scene displays a character torn by the intention to swim to the Northern shore against the "currents that push [him] to the Southern shore" (Ṣaliḥ, 1966: 150). More recent travel novels do not display this narrative tendency to be driven toward beginnings. By breaking away from the literary convention of return the evolved subgenre displays more progressive values.

Finally, the new discourse in the hypertextual novel emphasises a conciliatory attitude to the West. In the introductory chapter I discussed the relationship between left-wing nationalism and Islamism. The latter thrived on the speech genres of the former, adopting its anti-imperialistic and equalitarian discourses to enhance a discourse already rich with hostility (or disregard) to others (religious and racial). The persistence of the theme of sectarian strife at home, generally implied to be caused by religious fundamentalism, in a genre that had previously been devoted to tense relationships with a Western other indicates that writers wish to change the ideological values of their textual precedents. This might explain the tendency for contemporary novelists to abandon the remnants of attachment to cultural purity and instead, as Fathi Shihibi (2009) notices "start new and unchartered territories in the travel genre"

by presenting a model whereby a human being desires to become a truly global soul through travel (93). It appears that contemporary novelists have taken heed of the type of discourse Edward Said (1979) warns about in the concluding remarks to *Orientalism*:

> I consider Orientalism's failure to be a human as much as an intellectual one; for in having to take up a position of irreducible opposition to a region of the world it considered alien to its own, Orientalism failed to identify with human experience, failed also to see it as human experience..... I hope to have shown my reader that the answer to Orientalism is not Occidentalism. No former 'Oriental' will be comforted by the thought that having been an Oriental himself he is likely – too likely – to study new "Orientals" – or "Occidentals" – of his own making (328).

Chapter Seven: Conclusion

In this thesis, I have demonstrated a process of novels narrating their own departure from the sphere of influence of a set of ideas about national identity, radical politics and commitment art that had characterised some of the novels of the previous generation. I used ᶜAbd al-Raḥmān Munīf's *Sharq al-Mutawassiṭ* as one of the examples of what was being resisted in the new narratives. Munīf demonstrates a heightened consciousness of the generic transformations I described in this study in the appropriate sequel to that novel, *Sharq al-Mutawassiṭ Marratan 'Ukhra* (1991, East of the Mediterranean Once Again). Rewriting the brutal narrative of torture in the prototype, the more recent novel emphasises the complicity of both "the government and the governed" in the ills of the fictional nation (451). There is a sense of shared humanity with both compatriots (including government officials, policemen, soldiers) and Europeans. The speech genres of radicalism are caricatured and the stock character of the activist mocked. The idea of a common experience of life for a people or a nation that was present in the prototype is challenged through the discrepancies in the confessions of the two main characters of the prisoners. Most importantly, the inevitability of the fate of the country and its inhabitants that characterised the prototype vanishes in the Nineties' sequel and is replaced with a belief in the role of individual actions and responsibilities in both personal and national realities.

In isolating specific points of contention that the hypertextual novels raised in a dialogic relation to their predecessors, by which I meant that the novels were written to answer back to and oppose a presuppositioned narrative, I identified a more conciliatory stance toward the West, an openness to ideas associated with economic liberalism (specifically a more positive view of entrepreneurship, industry and personal responsibility for work and prosperity), a focus on personal freedoms and an increased emphasis on the precarious situation of minorities in the Middle East. The contention on these points was in no way a recent one in the historical period I covered in this study, for the different political movements that existed when most Arab nations were still in the phase of imagining and liberating themselves were struggling with them decades before. They were selected as points of focus for this thesis because they have

informed the framework for the study of modern Arabic literary fiction, and therefore have provided me a basis for discussion with others in the field. This limitation is crystallised in Roger Allen's (2007) summary of the template that has informed the scholarship on modern Arabic literary history that:

> Involved two processes. The first of them is the one we all know and love, from a trans-cultural perspective, contacts with Europe…coupled to the phenomena of resistance to colonial occupation and the development of national identity and nationalist movements have become the predominant matrix in the crafting of literary histories devoted to the development of Arabic fiction (251).

In adhering to this predominant matrix, this thesis has been able to explicate its argument regarding emerging individualism and the evolution of biographical narratives by engaging with ongoing discussions within the academic discipline. However, this has been done at the expense of downplaying the importance of many other aspects of the selected novels (not to mention the issues with selection process itself) that the implied authors and readers may have deemed crucial but that did not necessarily fit within the framework of discussions within the field.[109]

Part of the reason for the oversimplification and the gap in literary history, as Roger Allen (2007) elaborates, is that speaking about the entire category of the Arabic novel means failing to pay attention to the nuances and particularities of either location or genre. On the study of Arabic literary history, Allen gives examples of "the failure of the scholarly community to come to terms with the nature of generic change" (254). This thesis delved into the particularities of some subgenres of the Arabic novel at the expense of a more precise differentiation of localities and time periods. It can be said that, paradoxically, the Arabic language along with the stable speech genres of the unity of Arab peoples allowed literary trends to move across national borders within the region, even when those trends were directed to the purpose of dismantling the myth of Arab unity. Furthermore, in order to study a subgenre's progression in a meaningful manner, the historical time-frame must be significant. That being said, this study has been limited in its findings because of the magnitude of its spatial and temporal reach.

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[109] Jacquemond (2008) and Meyer (2001) have explained how this frequent form of limitation in the scholarship has affected the overview on the developments of the Arabic novel.

Essentially this thesis has explored ideas on subjectivity in the contemporary Arabic novel. The subject has been debated both in creative writings and in the literary criticism on the Arabic novel, as it is the site of dispute in more general readings of the postcolonial novel. For example, in his comparison between the modern European and the postcolonial Bildungsroman, Gregory Castle (2006) notes that the young character in the latter is posited to fail in the genre's principle of self-cultivation because "the colonized suffers isolation of his own subjectivity" (161). This statement is an element of a metatextual trend that has evolved regarding the subject in non-Western cultural productions: in societies with economic and political strife, especially those resulting from colonialism and current Western hegemonic politics, the human subject does not have the capacity and the agency to actualise idealised notions of selfhood. This secondary speech genre carries resonances of the discourse that I have identified in the hypotexts associated with the post-independence era in the Arab world (particularly those written in the Sixties and Seventies). It has been my intention to show how contemporary novels have attempted to destabilise this repetitive speech genre and reinvent the narrative of subjectivity in the Arabic novel. I have emphasised that autonomy, unique and inherent personal traits, the sanctity of the private in comparison to the public and the fruitfulness of individual actions and self-interested behaviour acted as evidence of an individualistic world view that demonstrates an increased confidence in subjectivity compared to hypotextual writings.

Albert Hourani (1983) defined "liberal" thinkers in the nineteenth and early twentieth century as those who were willing to interact, to differing degrees, with the institutions and ideas of modern Europe and who were looking to develop democratic institutions, powers of government and individual rights. In his preface to the 1983 edition of his seminal book on *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age*, he hinted at why he "does not try to carry the story [of liberal thought] beyond 1962." Something about the revival of Islam, the "language of socialism" through which nationalism expressed itself, and "the broadening of the idea of Arab nationalism, to include all Arab speaking countries" signalled, for this writer, the end of the liberal age at that time. The liberals that he describes prior to 1962:

> Belonged to families of standing and wealth or had raised themselves into that class by their own efforts…The aim of nationalism was to release the national energy in economic as well as other spheres of life; in its economic aspect, independence was regarded as a process of liberating the economic life of the nation from foreign control and giving free scope to the forces of national enterprise…[and to be] modern was to be in communion with [Europe]" (344-6).

Hourani ended his book on liberal thought by referring to the heated debates on intellectual freedom in the mid-twentieth century but specifically to the role of commitment in literature versus a doctrine of man as being "beyond all social and economic determination" (373). For him, this very debate was a sign that the liberal age was declining in the 1950s. He, like Laroui (1974), Abu Rabi' (2004), and Ajami (1981), often mention that liberal thinkers became despondent and withdrew from the public arena due to the prevalence of radicalism among Arab intelligentsia. It has been my purpose in this study to show that these ideological positions that historians of intellectual thought have identified with Arab liberalism experienced a revival in the fiction of the late twentieth century and the Noughties.

However, this revivalism has witnessed two important developments compared with the pre-independence era. The two diverging trends Hourani (1983) and Badawi (1993) described in the early twentieth century between those who reverted to Muslim fundamentalism and those who felt that maintaining the ethos of tradition and religion was desirable while modernising society and culture have evolved. Whereas Hourani's nationalists seemed more accommodating to the West than those he placed in the camp of Muslim fundamentalism, by the end of the twentieth century nationalists are portrayed in the implied individualist narratives of the contemporary novels as forming an intellectual rapport with radicalised Islamists in taking an adversarial stance toward the West. Hourani had already documented such trends in the aftermath of the Second World War. Secondly, far from seeing creative writers as an instrumental force in modernising their nations as the first wave of liberals believed, a certain humility can be sensed in the position of the implied "individualist" authors of the novels in my study: they do not see themselves as a reflection of a broader phenomenon, a political movement or an age. Hourani looks back at his original book in 1983 some 20 years after it was written and understands that at the time he wrote it, reflecting the way he as an intellectual

thought in the Fifties and Sixties, he felt that a small group of thinkers could change their society. This is perhaps the most important change that has taken place in the liberal intellectual attitude as can be found in the contemporary biographical novel: the acknowledgement by implied authors that their world is private and that they have little if any influence on their society. If Hourani's words about ideas having a life of their own are true, then it is that these liberal thinkers from that previous generation were influential on a later generation of others similar to themselves (as is evidenced by Khālid al-Birrī's autobiography, for example) rather than on society at large. In 1983, Hourani realised that the masses were moved into political action largely by those in the religious or traditional establishment that he, in the Fifties and Sixties, thought had been sidelined. With such hindsight, the authors in my study never betray a desire to "educate the masses" or eradicate communal traditions as their predecessors did, and as their radical contemporaries continued to do.

It has often been noted that, in order to stay aligned with popular sentiments, radical intellectuals "choose to interpret religion in a different way, explaining it as one way of consolidating their connection with the masses" as al-Daif's (1995) *ʿAzīzī al-Sayyid Kawābātā* regretfully concluded (Musawi, 2009, 230).[110] Musawi sceptically asks of some Arabic Bildungsroman if their "protagonists [are] capable of turning into actual speakers outside the limited domain of the elite?" (12). This study has shown that the answer is clearly negative, and that the fictional intellectual and the authors who created them are well aware of that. Furthermore, it has shown how the previous privileged status of travellers and political activists, who were once held in a certain esteem in society as Musawi rightly observes, has been lost in the contemporary narratives. After the failure of the previous liberal experiment that Hourani and Musawi describe in their works, new fictions shows an individualist awareness of those persons' marginal position within culture. This applies even when the protagonist does not belong to an elite group of intellectuals. It applies even more to the struggling classes of disappointed activists and immigrants that the novels of this study have presented. But, rather than dismiss the marginal experiences of these deliberately unrepresentative protagonists (as Musawi's critique does),

[110] See Abu Rabi' (2004) and Ajami (1981).

there is an appreciation of their unique position which is imbued with great significance.

Al-Shadhlī's (1985) description of the previous generation of novels of selfhood before the Fifties shows how their implied authors, too, were grappling with the speech genres of national identity and independence from imperialism although the struggles were internalised within a character. The implied writers and readers of that time shared a conviction that the intellectuals that these novels portrayed, like themselves, represented the anxieties and the ennui of a certain class of thinkers or progressives within a premodern society.[111] Musawi's (2009) contention is that "the novel of apprenticeship (through contact) is the most dominant form in the first half of the twentieth century" (42). He assumes that this kind of novel declined thereafter. My study refutes this claim. However, I have chosen to focus on the contemporary narratives of selfhood's "individualism" rather than the liberalism that Musawi and Hourani identify in the earlier narratives precisely because the new narratives present a critique of the ideologies and the ideologues of the previous generation of authors and readers by rupturing the implied collusion between them against the rest of society. Each character exists in a very unique (and lonely) universe and is on a journey that cannot be repeated by others. As an astute observer of the Nineties' novel remarks, they "even fell out with those who agreed with them" (ᶜAwad, 2006).

It follows that, although the novels I have presented in this study have delved in political topics and themes, they have not pretended to propagate specific political causes. This point is very evident if one compares Munīf's (1975, 1991) two *Sharq al-Mutawassiṭ* novels. The sequel also discussed the oppressiveness of Arab regimes, the activities of outlawed political groups and the economic and social problems of the region. However, while the first novel clearly indicates that there will be an inevitable resolution when the oppressed people unite in revolt against Arab regimes, the latter offers no such vision. This is not out of hopelessness. On the contrary, when the political activist in the sequel is finally released from a long period of imprisonment and illness he is more than happy, in the end of the 1991 novel, to be editing a popular fashion

[111] See Allen (1995) for more on these themes within the early Arabic novel.

magazine in Paris. There is an implied message that the happiness he finds is more important than the nebulous goals he fought for in his youth. The very long narrative presenting heated political arguments between ex-prisoners and describing their torture does not culminate in the explanation of the author's own political position, as the original novel did.

This individualistic trend has been repeatedly noted by many of those interested in the Arabic novel. For example, in a late article the novelist Naguib Mahfouz (2005) explained his belief that the Arabic novel will return to its "role of expressing human nature and the social history of ongoing developments" instead of portraying "mere figures" as it did at the time of the article (47). His opinion was that local novel could only compete with the advanced techniques of the international novel by staying true to its locality and remaining relevant to local readers. This article is another expression of Mahfouz's own ideas on literature, and is also a manifestation of the problematic that what Mahfouz (and others) see as the crisis of the novel is in fact the crisis of social realism in novels in the late twentieth century, while the biographical genre has thrived and flourished in its narration of "mere figures".

At this point it would benefit us to revisit the question of whether these trends I have described amount to a reactionary trend in the Arabic novel. Those trends that have been associated with resistance to the *Nahda*'s reformist narrative of modernisation of nations and a cooperative relationship with Europe have been deemed more in tune with the inclinations of the masses and less imitative of the "bourgeois" narrative of self-development.[112] Conversely, I have shown that the biographical novel has been more receptive to the ideas of the benefits of gradual reform, entrepreneurship, professional advancement and an unequivocal stance on the separation of the individual's life story from that of the nation or any community. Narratives that imply an adversarial stance to the West have been celebrated by some readers of the Arabic novel as forms of resistance, in comparison to the early *Nahda* narratives' perceived complacency to Western hegemony.[113] In the absence of these recognised forms of resistance, can the biographical novels of this study be considered reactionary?

[112] See Hafez (1976), Mehrez (2002) and Musawi (2009) for examples of this view.
[113] Ibid

One of the primary objectives of this research project was to explore this question. I have shown how the authors of biographical novels entered into dialogue with what they perceived as simplistic, repetitive ideas on what constituted resistance in previous prototypical novels. In other words, adversarial stances to the West, an exaggerated willingness to engage popular sentiments on religion, pan-Arabism and social mobility regardless of content, and more significantly, a vision of literature as a field for wider sociopolitical critique and action were seen by implied authors as the codified language of the already-read texts of fiction and intellectual debate.

These codes have been repeatedly endorsed by many historians of the Arabic novel. In 1995, for example, Roger Allen described how the reader may find in it “the need to reflect on political and societal tensions” and claimed that the Arabic novel is “*based* on the continuing response to the challenge of the West....the burning issues of nation and region...[and] political, social and cultural priorities and biases”(my italics, 50-1). My approach refused to either see the resignification of these codes as a “decline” as Mahfouz (2005) and Mehrez (2002) did at the time they were writing, or to sideline the individualism of the narratives by denying or underplaying it, as Siddiq (1986) did. Siddiq presented his “perspective” that the Arabic novel is a genre that relegates form and aesthetic elements for a focus on content that is sociopolitical. Siddiq seems to be apologising for the aesthetic void caused by the novel’s “involvement in current events” (206). Between such a view on the Arabic novel, that its reflection of social realities diminishes its aesthetic quality, and the other view, that those novels that defied being boiled down to socio-political critique contributed to a perceived aesthetic decline in contemporary fiction, something was lost in analysis. It has been the purpose of this thesis to contribute to a better understanding of these individualistic developments in the contemporary Arabic novel without the oversimplification of both of these camps.

These disagreements on how to read the Arabic novel, especially those revolving around the importance of the individual within them, can be extrapolated to reflect the dilemmas of studying the non-Western novel. To give examples of such theories of non-Western literature, Jameson (1986) questioned whether Third World literature must mimic Western literature in the

latter's disdain for nationalism. He wondered whether nationalism may be good for the Third World. Jameson thought that in the Western novel there is a divide between the private self and public self. On the other hand, in the Third World, "the story of the private individual destiny is always an allegory of the embattled situation of the public third-world culture and society" (69). Needless to say, this is one sweeping generalisation as I have shown in this study.

One cannot help but dislike how Jameson's premise robs "Third World" *individuals* of the private life and liberty that the West (according to him) believes it monopolises. Neither are Jameson's views on "Third World" and "nationalist" novels particularly unique, for they are an example of a vast array of theory on how the non-Western novel represents a:

> Critical assault… on the Individualist Bildungsroman [in Western literary tradition…and the] view of persons as self-defining beings capable of personal liberation, their narrative of persons who transcend the constricting influences of personal history to achieve independence, and their model …that represents the progressive education of a single subjectivity (Peppis, 1994: 229).

Overarching assumptions such as these about various traditions of non-Western Bildungsromane abound, generally revolving around the idea that failure to achieve self-cultivation in them accounts to a critique of the "illegitimacy" of the postcolonial or patriarchal society.[114] In this study I have focused on novels where private lives and selves of characters and their agency are given utmost importance and the implied message of the novels is an oppositional one to Jameson (1986), Peppis (1994), Lima (2002) and many others. The conclusion of my survey of numerous novels is that the "illegitimacy" of external social and political factors did not wholly deprive the subject of agency or ability to thrive toward a wholesome individuality, and that the critiques of each individual's failure to do so were increasingly internalised. As Gregory Castle (2013) shows:

> Bildung is not so easily separated from development; even in its negative…form it continues to motivate and underwrite aspirations for wholeness and unity of being. Although the Bildungsroman in the twentieth century is often a generic failure, we need not decouple Bildung from this failed enterprise (629).

This metatextual discourse on the non-Western Bildungsroman extends to non-Western autobiography as well. Graham Huggan (2001) makes similar

[114] See, for example, Lima (2002).

arguments on “ethnic autobiography,” which he feels makes a “cult of authenticity” and is a form that the dominant (Western) culture demands from ethnic people and “watches over” (155). Such an argument tends to recycle the autobiographical genre’s message about authenticity and agency into a narrative of political dominance usurping the autonomy of the autobiographer, and further feeds the metatextual trend that presents “the West [as] the all-important other” against which a substantial portion of modern Arabic literature is written (Phillips, 2012: 118). It also disregards the strong literary trends of autobiography in the non-dominant culture, such as the *sīra* in Arabic. Huggan claims that “ethnic autobiography” tends to involve an individual’s search for cultural authenticity, but this is the precise feature of autobiography that I have shown has been challenged in the contemporary Arabic autobiographical novel. No doubt such theoretical problems arise because of a tendency in some postcolonial approaches to generalise about countries that were previously colonised.[115]

Discussions about peripheral autobiographies that are written for consumption by Western readers, or the commodification of cultural difference, propel questions about a work’s staged exoticism. Conversely, I have found in the selected travel novels of this study a conscious effort by Arab writers to unpack any remnants of exoticism in the genre, perhaps because they did not have such readers in mind. If anything, these writings reveal the processes by which their literary predecessors exoticised Western cultures. It would be very interesting to compare this strong tendency to parody exoticism of the West in other literary traditions within the same time-frame, something that was out of the scope of this research. However, it has clarified that such generalisations about postcolonial writing are problematic to use for interpretations of the Arabic novel.

This observation must be cautioned with a note on those novels that have been selected for translation and criticism. A stark example is how reading al-Shaykh’s (1980) *Ḥikāyat Zahra* in English may leave an impression that the author intended to exoticise the characters for the consumption of Western or cosmopolitan readers, as Huggan (2001) believes “ethnic autobiography” often

[115] Huggan (2001) summarises more of these legitimate reservations about postcolonial approaches.

does. I would like to point out that in his translation, Peter Ford (1986) has repeatedly omitted words that stress the centrality of Zahra's introspection in this novel. Here is one example:

The Arabic:

lam ʻaᶜud ʻanā Zahra. hādhā bi ʻikhtisār. tasāʼulātī… lā tantahī. limādhā muntaṣaf hādhā al-shāriᶜ ḥattā ākhirahu lā yaquffu ᶜan al-ʻanīn wa ʻl-dimāʼ (al-Shaykh, 153).

I translate as:

I am no longer Zahra. That is to cut things short. My questions do not end. How is it that death has come to rule over half the street?

In his translation, Peter Ford removes the first two sentences of the Arabic. In the Arabic, the significance of these two are in Zahra's personal progress, hence "I am no longer Zahra". In Ford's translation, it appears that the novel is merely describing the events of the war, rather than the events of Zahra's inner history. This is one of the many examples by which this novel's confessional and individualistic quality has been diminished for the purposes of commodification to an audience interested in reading about categories such as "women in Lebanese war novels".

Interestingly, Huggan (2001) shows that postcolonialism as a "rhetoric of resistance" has become a consumer product in the field of academic and intellectual capital (6). He speaks of this rhetoric among Western academics or creative writers that are popular in the West, however, the selected novels of this study are registers of a rising awareness of the packaged and recycled speech genres of resistance (to Western hegemony and capitalism in particular) that had propagated among Arab intellectuals and authors as well. The discourse in these late texts offers its own challenge to trends within postcolonial theory.

I have mentioned that the traces of the codes of animosity to the West were not urgent, specifically because the problems at home were much more so. This finding relates to Christina Phillips' (2012) objection to the "over-valorization of the East/West opposition" in criticism of the Arabic novel which has obscured other important struggles, such as the one with Islam that was present in many of the selected novels in this study (118). The selected Lebanese, Iraqi, and Algerian novels referred to the atrocities of the real war within society, compared to the less dangerous confrontations with the West.

However, more fascinating was how the works from Egypt, a notoriously "stable" country politically when the novels were written, managed to present it as the site of extremely volatile relationships between religions, political and ideological affiliations and to a lesser extent, classes.

The original scope of this study ends with novels written in 2010, when the research project was originally conceived. I have been adamant not to pursue works after this date. Particularly in the aftermath of the Arab Uprisings, I expected a plethora of new writings and potentially new literary movements that I was sure needed more time in order to be construed of within given literary trends and generic developments. This study's findings could impact research into the literature of Arab countries in the period leading up to 2011 and an investigation of the literary trends they shared.

In her work on the narratives that anticipated the Arab Spring, Rita Sakr (2013) discusses the emergence of narratives that legitimise the grievances of "inexistent" elements within Arab populations against forces guilty of "exploitation and human rights abuses" (2). Sakr locates narratives that were prescient about the uprisings and that were particularly attuned to the fermenting anger against corrupt, ineffective and oppressive regimes. For example, she and others have mentioned al-Aswany's (2006) *The Yacoubian Building* as a clear instance of those works that presented the socio-political dynamics that led to the revolution. As Sakr notes, al-Aswany's popular novel is a successful example of a prevalent form of fiction in which the authorial voice is a mirror of the presuppositioned public conscience. The narrator's discourse imitates the dominant sociolect. This is exactly the literary tradition that the individualistic voices of biographical novel have resisted, by distinguishing the authorial voice from the conventional expectation that it belongs to a public intellectual, and by challenging the tenuous concept of "public conscience" or "conscience of the nation" altogether.[116] Yet these biographical narrative were prescient of recent developments in their own way. As Sakr notes of recent Egyptian novels, they "revea[l] the defeat of a vision of a united and cohesive Egypt and instead foreshadow the deadly sectarian confrontation after Mubarak's downfall…what is thus defeated is the national dream" (44).

[116] See Jacquemond (2008).

What my thesis contributes to such an effort of revisiting the works that anticipated the Arab Spring is in its findings that the writers of biographical novels reflected the anger at society *as a whole*; biographical novels excelled at revealing the "ills of both the government and the governed" with more emphasis on the latter (Munīf, 1991: 451). As such, my research better anticipates the speech genres on liberties and human rights that were manifested in the period immediately *after* the uprisings. No sooner had the regimes in Egypt and Tunisia toppled, for example, than were cries for "revolutionary trials" raised and images of a hangman's noose in Tahrir square broadcasted. Rashīd al-Ḍaᶜīf's (2001) autobiographical hero's haunting repetition that he "suffer(s) twice when the victim becomes the executioner," written more than fifteen years prior to this spectacle about another struggle altogether, seems eerily appropriate (215). Rita Sakr's association of the revolutions with the "human rights discourse" in the literature of the fifteen years prior to 2011, can be juxtaposed and better complimented with the human rights discourse that writers such as al-Ḍaᶜīf (1995) and al-Birrī (2010) offer as a reaction to revolutionary ideologies both leftist and Islamist, respectively.

The silencing of the emergent discourse on civil liberties in the short period of time after the revolutions can be considered, in retrospect, as a failure of revolutions that was anticipated by the many failures in the Arabic biographical novels of this study. In order to promote the human rights discourse that Sakr analyses and that Mcdougall (2010) brushed aside as something of marginal importance, biographical novels went back to the basics of protecting the rights and freedoms of the individual (see Chapters Three and Four). These were the most urgent values that were being threatened in what Sakr notices was the unenviable choice between the "prison" of state oppression and the "ruin" of violent sectarian and political differences, a choice we encountered in the novels of al-Birrī (2001), al-Razzāz (1986), and Munīf (1991) (98). Al-Birrī's autobiography's conclusion that state oppression was less harmful to him personally than the grip of Islamic extremism is also strangely prescient of Egypt's coup d'etat in 2013.

One can say that the contemporary biographical narratives reflected a discourse that attempted to continue the modernising trend of previous generation without falling prey to the fantasy that society as a whole could be

modernised or that the strong nation-state was a step toward secularising Arab societies (although it did have the abstract potential to protect civil rights). Solidarity within the communities in the narratives of the selected novels was proving increasingly difficult, and no solutions on the public plane were offered, only personal discoveries and decisions. This is why many of the narratives of development in this study do not approach what Bakhtin (1986) identified as the most significant type of Bildungsroman in which “Man’s individual emergence is inseparably linked to historical time…he emerges alongside the world”. In Bakhtin’s view, a progressive Bildungsroman presents Man evolving alongside a world whose foundations are changing. Instead, the narratives of this study have varied in their portrayals of characters’ developments (whether they develop at all or not, whether their developments are permanent or cyclical), but have all confirmed the lack of progression of the social world. Whether the next generation of biographical Arabic novels will reflect Bakhtin’s description of the progressive Bilungsroman is a question for studies of this genre in the future.

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